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LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HEALTH &
COMMUNITY STUDIES

Asset Based Community Development: Evaluation of Leeds ABCD

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Finally, we would like to thank the Leeds City Council ABCD team for commissioning us to do such a fascinating piece of work from which we have learnt so much. It has been a privilege to be involved and we hope that this report contributes to the development of ABCD practice in Leeds and beyond.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from the Leeds Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) programme evaluation.

ABCD is a neighbourhood-based community building approach that uses community organising methods to identify, mobilise and strengthen the capacities or asset of individuals, families and communities (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993).

Twelve ABCD pathfinder sites¹ operate in Leeds neighbourhoods, the majority established in 2019. The model consists of:

- Community Builders - paid workers hosted by Neighbourhood Organisations
- Community Connectors - individuals living locally who may organise and support local activities
- 'Small Sparks' grants - funds for groups and individuals to support local activity

A core principle is that, given the tools and the opportunity, small groups of citizens can change the things that they believe need changing in the community, better than anyone else.

The Leeds City Council (Leeds City Council) ABCD team, within the Adults and Health directorate, commission and coordinate the programme and the development of the model in the city. A local third sector organisation deliver training and facilitation for the programme.

The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Health Promotion at Leeds Beckett University. Its primary aim was to support Leeds City Council to build an evidence base for the ABCD programme. A Common Evaluation Framework was agreed collaboratively. An additional report reviews current evidence on the ABCD approach.

¹ At the time of the evaluation in 2020

Methodology

The evaluation was collaborative in nature. Methods included:

- Qualitative community-based research with six pathfinder sites. Including community walks, interviews, discussion groups and telephone interviews.
- Qualitative telephone interviews with key stakeholders (x10)
- Secondary analysis and synthesis of monitoring data from all pathfinder sites
- Support to pathfinders to help them self-evaluate
- A pilot Social Return on Investment (SROI)

Learning was shared and discussed with key informants at workshops to improve validity. A rigorous qualitative analysis was conducted with findings from different sources triangulated.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the UK mid evaluation. This affected both the programme itself, as Community Builders had to adapt their priorities, practice and activities, and the evaluation, as the more naturalistic methods planned (walks and discussion groups) were no longer possible. Planned data collection with Community Connectors and residents was particularly affected.

Findings

The grading terms adopted by the What Works Wellbeing Centre for their evidence briefings has been utilised to explain the relative strength of what was found (See Box ES1):

Box ES1: How strong is the evidence? [Adapted from What Works Wellbeing (Snape et al., 2019)]

STRONG – we can be confident that the evidence can be used to inform decisions.

PROMISING - we have moderate confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

INITIAL - we have low confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

Evidence can be **QUANTITATIVE** or **QUALITATIVE**

Context

Pathfinder sites are very diverse, ranging from ‘thriving’ to ‘struggling’. This variation includes socio-economic factors (e.g. levels of poverty), the quantity and quality of community infrastructure and levels of community cohesion. Some communities face stigma, however they do not want to be defined as ‘deprived,’ as this is not the whole picture of their neighbourhood. Communities may be facing hardship, fear, lack of trust and loss of infrastructure – this can be the starting point for ABCD.

Underpinning Mechanisms (How ABCD works)

- **The ABCD model – identifying & mobilising assets**

There is a good shared understanding of the ABCD model. The approach is ‘bottom up’, though some communities need more active support initially.

Asset mapping (an integral part of ABCD) is a useful process but how to involve communities and the best format for the resulting map are unresolved questions.

Assets are both tangible (e.g. cafes, parks) and intangible (e.g. community groups or networks). These are interdependent.

The Community Builder is a key role. They need to be able to engage with a wide range of people, have a good theoretical knowledge of ABCD and be able to ‘step back’ and give the community time and space to come forward. Being ‘local’ or from the area is helpful. There can be a tension between enabling and supporting.

The Community Builder role includes:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in and with the community • Asset mapping • Identifying and enabling Community Connectors • Working with individuals who need more support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to services and other groups • Supporting new and existing groups • Reporting & gathering evidence

There is **STRONG** evidence that ABCD works in different communities/contexts

- **Strengthening social connections**

Getting out into the community and having conversations is critical to making connections.

To make these connections Community Builders visit 'bumping' spaces, use media and engage in networks and with local organisations.

Community Connectors are people from the area who want to help/join in. 310 new Community Connectors were identified in a period of 18 months, ranging from 5 to 110 per site.

Neighbourhood Organisations offer a base for Community Builders to operate from and engage with residents.

There is **PROMISING** evidence regarding the Community Connector role. Numbers vary and who counts as a Connector is not always clear. Gathering their views was impacted by the pandemic.

- **Working with individuals**

Asset-based work with individuals starts with identifying the skills they can offer and encouraging them to connect with others. This enables people to go on a personal journey, increasing their connections and social activities.

The pandemic meant Community Builders needed to shift to helping some individuals.

- **Building community ownership and action**

Community activities, based on what communities want to do, have grown. Existing groups have been strengthened and new ones instigated. 48 Small Sparks grants were awarded in 18 months.

The Community Builder has a key role as a link person; they can be a catalyst, provide practical help, link people up and provide ongoing support to build community activities.

There is STRONG evidence on strengthening local groups and new community activities.

To conclude, ABCD is not a linear model, but a series of cycles of listening, connecting, building and ultimately achieving sustainable, inclusive community activity. Not every person, organisation nor group follows this cycle – some support is needed in different contexts. Mechanisms lead to outcomes at different points for people and communities

Outcomes

Three outcomes were agreed collaboratively for the ABCD pathfinders. Other outcomes also emerged.

- **Outcome 1: People have good friends**

ABCD provided opportunities for people to join in and connect with others. Everything started with a conversation.

Confidence, independence and wellbeing grew as people engaged with others.

New friendships were built within groups and supportive relationships were formed. Some friendships carried on outside these formal structures.

The pandemic brought some people closer together.

There is PROMISING evidence of friendships, with a plausible causal chain from foundations to meaningful relationships. The outcome is challenging to measure but consistently valued. It is not clear how many people are impacted.

- **Outcome 2: Individuals and communities are better connected**

Social connections were formed through groups, social activities and use of public spaces to meet people. 68 new self-sustaining groups, linked to ABCD, were formed in 18 months

Facilitating connections led naturally to stronger community networks.

There were some examples of greater community cohesion; bridging differences in generations and being more inclusive of people with disabilities.

During the pandemic social connections were fostered and there was more neighbourliness.

People were signposted to other support, services, and local activities.

Connections with local organisations and those further afield were made.

There is **STRONG** evidence for better social connections.

The pilot SROI shows **PROMISING** evidence of the social value of ABCD through increasing friendships and volunteering.

The estimated social value for the established pathfinder was within the range of £5.27 and £14.02 for every £1 invested.

- **Outcome 3: Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see**

The pathway starts with increased motivation demonstrated by new ideas, confidence and enthusiasm.

There were examples of sharing ideas and planning together. Many means of involvement were demonstrated ranging from informal conversations to establishing new groups and taking part in consultations and steering groups.

There were some examples of positive community action bringing about changes in the neighbourhoods.

There is **STRONG** qualitative evidence on the typical pathway to community change with clear links between early asset-based conversations with later community action.

There is **PROMISING** evidence on community change. Some examples given but no sense of impact.

- **Other outcomes**

Additional outcomes that emerged include:

- Changes in the mindset of residents towards being more active in the community

- Increased morale in the community
- Improved health & wellbeing of individuals due to increased social interaction, increased confidence and feeling valued
- Opportunities for training and employment for individuals
- Increased support for ABCD in organisations with changes in the mindset of workers

There is PROMISING evidence on other outcomes. Whilst it was not the focus of the evaluation individual and organisational outcomes were reported.

Influencing Factors for ABCD pathfinder sites

<p>Common barriers/challenges are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of places to meet • Individuals who need more support • Engagement ebbing and flowing • Lone working for the Community builder • Group conflicts • Culture clash and differing expectations of Neighbourhood Organisations or council services • The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions in social activities <p>In struggling areas, barriers could also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low trust due to previous initiatives • Difficult lives/poverty affecting engagement • Antisocial behaviour in community – leading to a lack of trust and engagement in activities 	<p>Enabling factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having time for ABCD to embed and to allow trusting relationships to develop between the Community Builder, local organisations and the community • Working with Neighbourhood Organisations that have aligned values to ABCD • Community Builders being known and trusted • Peer and mentoring support for Community Builders to build experience • Small Sparks funding allowing groups to quickly make progress • Opportunities for dialogue/networking
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There is PROMISING evidence of factors influencing the success of the model. Some are common across pathfinders whilst others are site specific.

To **achieve sustainability** for the ABCD pathfinder model, there needs to be:

- Long term growth of community action/social connections in pathfinder sites
- Sharing and learning between pathfinders, across the city and beyond
- Leadership support for ABCD
- Incorporating asset-based working in other services; rippling out
- Citizen-led approach balanced with council responsibilities

There is INITIAL evidence on how to achieve sustainability. It is relatively early in the programme's development; however stakeholders are positive about sharing the model

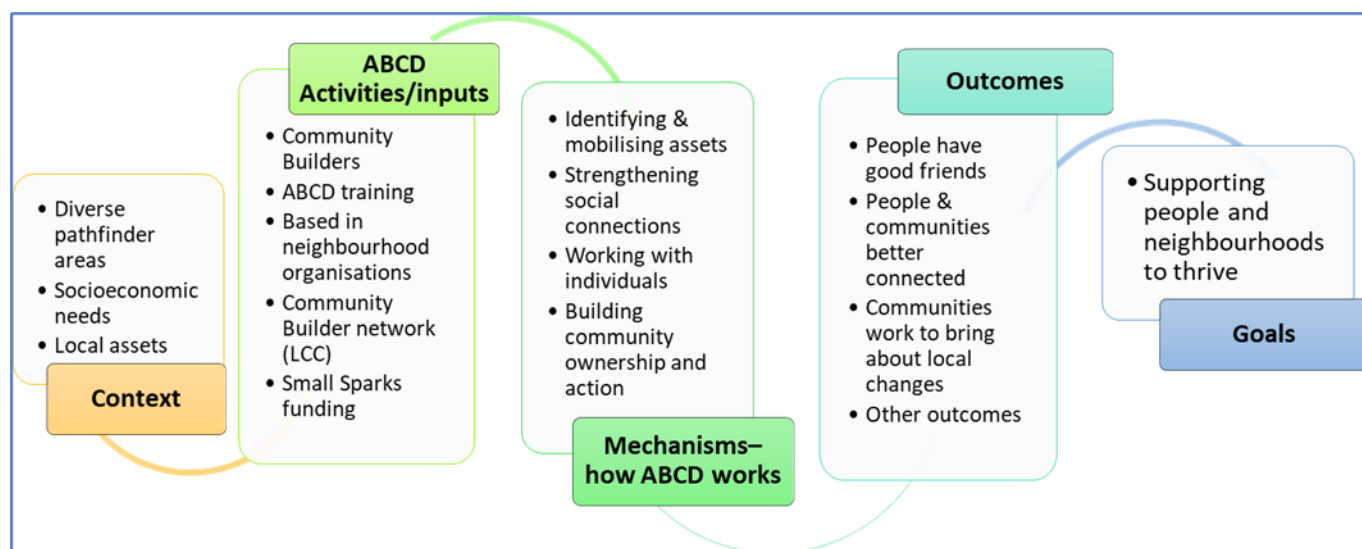
Conclusion

The pioneering Leeds ABCD pathfinder model is still relatively new in its development, given that shifting to citizen-led activity takes time. Nonetheless the evaluation has presented strong evidence on how ABCD works and the mechanisms of change thus demonstrating how a city-wide approach can be implemented.

There is strong evidence for better social connections and the pathway to community change. Promising evidence for increased friendships, the social value of the pathfinder model, change in communities and other additional outcomes exists. A series of recommendations and issues for consideration are presented to inform programme development.

Figure ES1 below shows diagrammatically how ABCD works in pathfinder sites.

Figure ES1: A Theory of Change based on evaluation findings



Section 1: Introduction

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a neighbourhood-based community building approach that uses community organising methods to identify, mobilise and strengthen the capacities or assets of individuals, families and communities (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). The focus is on communities ‘building from the inside out’, setting up local activities based on the things that matter to them and strengthening connections between each other (Kretzmann, 1998, Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, Mathie and Cunningham, 2005). Across the UK there has been increasing interest in using asset-based approaches as a way of improving health and wellbeing in communities (Cassetti et al., 2019, Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012, Public Health England and NHS England, 2015), tackling the impacts of inequalities and deprivation (de Andrade and Angelova, 2020) and improving services by focusing on what matters to people, not what is the matter with them (Hopkins and Rippon, 2015, McLean et al., 2017).

Leeds City Council (Leeds City Council) has taken a pioneering approach to developing asset-based working (Keenan and Ward, 2020). The Adults and Health directorate’s Better Lives Strategy places an emphasis on a strengths-based approach to social care, which builds on the strengths of individuals, their families, and the local community - supporting people to feel better connected. Having strong, resilient and connected communities is crucial to this approach. The Leeds ABCD programme was established in 2017, initially with three pathfinder sites in neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation, with each site receiving some funding from Leeds City Council Adults and Health. In 2019, the Leeds ABCD programme was expanded to 12 pathfinder sites. It was originally intended that each would cover around 5,000 -10,000 residents². This was part of a broader shift towards more asset-based working in the council (Keenan and Ward, 2020) and links with developments such as Local Care Partnerships and the council’s new locality approach, which will facilitate greater integrated working at a neighbourhood level between communities, health/social care and third sector partners. Overall, the ABCD programme can be seen as a radical step; to our knowledge, there is no other UK city that has committed to roll out an ABCD programme of this size.

“Our vision is for everyone in Leeds, including those with care and support needs, to have the opportunity to contribute to, be valued by, and be involved with, where they live and for communities to recognise their assets, forge strong connections with one another and feel able to make the changes they want to see. The assumption is that, given the tools and the opportunity, small groups of local residents can change the things that they believe need changing in their community better than anyone else.” (Keenan and Ward, 2020)

² The figure of 5-10,000 residents was used regularly by Leeds City Council in meetings. However, we have not been able to find a written reference for this figure.

Key features of Leeds ABCD programme

Key features of the current ABCD programme are drawn from an Executive Board report³ and information provided in February 2021 by the ABCD team.

ABCD pathfinder sites use the model of Community Builders, Community Connectors, 'Small Sparks' funding and work to support communities to be inclusive and welcoming to all.

At the time of writing, 12 ABCD pathfinder sites are funded by Leeds City Council. 11 are funded by the Adults and Health Directorate and one by the Children and Families Directorate. Several sites have a particular lens:

- Two have a key focus on supporting people with learning disabilities to be better connected to their community
- One has a focus on Carers
- One, funded by Children and Families, has a literacy focus

Sites were established at different times. Three test and learn ABCD pathfinder sites were set up in 2017/18, one of which was a Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) focused organisation. Nine were established in 2019/2020 whilst one more is currently in development. Two former sites no longer receive funding as pathfinders; one is now funded as a Community Catalyst (see below) whilst one withdrew from the offer of continuation funding.

Box 1: Leeds ABCD roles

ABCD pathfinder sites are third sector organisations (referred to as Neighbourhood Organisations in this report) commissioned by Leeds City Council to support ABCD in a specific neighbourhood.

Community Builders are employed through the sites to proliferate and support ABCD. Their work is underpinned by three core principles:

- That given the tools and the opportunity, small groups of citizens can change the things that they believe need changing in their community better than anyone else.
- That there are things best led by citizens but with support from outside agencies and organisations through collaborative partnerships.
- There are things best undertaken by institutions and agencies with specialist expertise.

Community Connectors are individuals living in the area, identified by Community Builders. They are good at discovering what people care about and where their gifts and skills can be used. They might work with individuals to organise and support local activities driven by the community as part of ABCD in their neighbourhood. This role is voluntary.

Leeds City Council ABCD team commission and coordinate the ABCD programme. That includes supporting the pathfinder sites and the Community Builders to proliferate ABCD in specific neighbourhoods in Leeds.

³Source: Director of Adults and Health, Leeds City Council, Report to the Executive Board, September 2020

Touchstone (a Leeds asset-based Third Sector Organisation) are commissioned to deliver the ABCD Training and Facilitation grant. This includes an ABCD training programme, website and social media presence. They also support the Community Builders through ABCD pathfinder meetings.

ABCD Community 'Catalyst' organisations (x2) are funded to provide peer support to the pathfinders and share learning with organisations in Leeds as well as external visitors.

The ABCD team, situated within the Adults and Health directorate, oversee the ABCD programme and its development of the pathfinder model across Leeds.

Their role includes supporting other teams to adapt to asset-based ways of working and strengths-based principles. In 2019/20, they spoke with 236 individuals/organisations and provided briefings and presentations on asset-based principles to a range of services.

At a national level, they share best practice via presentations and case studies. They have contributed to publications such as: A Glass Half-full: 10 years on review and an AGE UK report entitled "Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective interventions to reducing loneliness in later life".

The team are part of the Upstream Collaborative, an active learning network of practitioners from 20 local authorities looking at rebuilding relationships with communities through asset-based approaches.

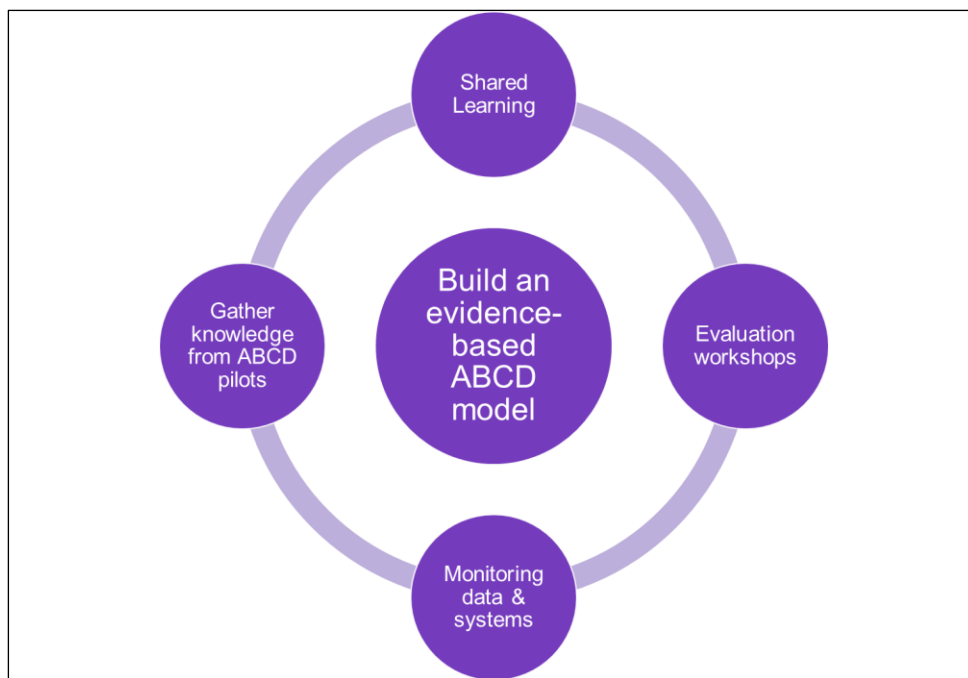
They have also hosted national and international visitors to Leeds to showcase the ABCD pathfinder sites and strengths-based social care work.

Leeds ABCD evaluation

The Centre for Health Promotion Research (CHPR), Leeds Beckett University was commissioned to evaluate the Leeds ABCD Pathfinders programme. The primary aim of the evaluation has been to support Leeds City Council build an evidence base for the ABCD programme. We have taken a collaborative approach working together with the council and Community Builders to research and evaluate progress (Figure 1). The ABCD Common Evaluation Framework, developed by the Leeds ABCD Measuring Impact Group in 2018⁴, provided a framework for the evaluation (Appendix 1).

Figure 1: Leeds ABCD evaluation

⁴ An early working group looking at evaluation, coordinated by Leeds City Council, with representation from the ABCD team, community-based organisations, and Leeds Beckett University.



Evaluation objectives and research questions

1. To articulate the Leeds ABCD model, what it is and how it works, in a simple Theory of Change based on stakeholder perspectives and linked to the evidence base on community wellbeing.
 - What is the Leeds ABCD model and how does it work in Leeds communities and across the city?
 - How and why has the Leeds ABCD model evolved in different areas?
 - What have been the main factors influencing implementation?
 - What are the benefits and perceived value of ABCD compared to other types of community-based interventions and for whom? What are the perceived disadvantages?
 - Does ABCD bring a Social Return on Investment (SROI) and how easy is that to measure?

2. To gather and analyse data from the pathfinder sites on processes and impacts at individual, community and organisational levels.
 - How does ABCD work at neighbourhood level and in terms of reach and participation, who gets involved and how?
 - How are assets identified, mobilised and strengthened?
 - What are the primary mechanisms of change for individuals, communities and organisations/services?
 - What are the outcomes, including unanticipated outcomes, for individuals, communities and organisations?

3. To facilitate shared learning on the development, implementation, leadership and evaluation of ABCD as a city initiative.
4. With Leeds City Council, to establish community-friendly monitoring systems that can track progress and to draw up recommendations for the further evaluation of ABCD.

How this report is organised

This report consists of the following sections:

- Section 2 gives an overview of the evaluation methodology including the approach and methods utilised.
- Section 3 presents the findings relating to the pathfinder sites. Section 3a gives summary profiles of six pathfinder sites. Section 3b covers process related themes and Section 3c outcomes.
- Section 4 presents findings relating to programme-level aspects.
- Section 5 presents the Social Return on Investment (SROI) results.
- Section 6 covers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the evaluation and the ABCD programme.
- Section 7 summarises and maps the evidence to a revised Theory of Change
- Section 8 gives an overview of key learning, emerging issues and discusses limitations
- Section 9 presents key recommendations for the ABCD programme in the future

An additional report “Asset-Based Community Development: a review of current evidence” (Woodward et al, in press) collates existing evidence. Information from this feeds into the evaluation objectives.

Section 2: Methods

Evaluation approach

A mixed methods evaluation, using predominately qualitative, community-based methods, was undertaken to gather evidence on how and why the Leeds ABCD pathfinder programme works and what the impacts have been for individuals, communities and organisations. This was a collaborative evaluation between Leeds City Council ABCD team, the network of ABCD Community Builders, and the research team at Leeds Beckett (see Box 2).

We designed the evaluation to fit with the strengths-based ethos and principles of ABCD (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012) and to incorporate recognised research strategies for evaluating asset-based working (Rippon and South, 2017). Previous research has highlighted the need to strengthen the evidence base for asset-based approaches and the challenges of capturing robust evidence on developmental changes in communities (Blickem et al., 2018, de Andrade and Angelova, 2020).

Box 2: Principles guiding the Leeds ABCD evaluation

Taking an asset-based approach to the evaluation means that the research team will:

- work collaboratively with stakeholders to gather evidence
- respect the wisdom and experience of those working and living in communities
- seek to identify strengths as well as needs
- commit to sharing learning so those involved in community building can benefit from the evaluation.

The evaluation design was informed by a Theory of Change that seeks to understand the links between context, activities, mechanisms and outcomes (Connell and Kubisch, 1988). Prior to the evaluation, the Leeds City Council ABCD working group (see earlier) developed an initial Common Evaluation Framework that identified three key outcomes for the Leeds ABCD Pathfinders (Appendix 1):

- Individuals and communities are better connected
- Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see
- People have good friends.

An initial formative evaluation workshop was held in July 2019 with Leeds City Council ABCD team and the first pathfinders, where participants confirmed these outcomes and discussed how the evaluation should run.

For this evaluation, it was agreed not to undertake quantitative surveys of residents to gain numerical evidence of change. This was due to associated difficulties with this approach, particularly as ABCD is in the process of being established in neighbourhoods and relationships formed. These potential difficulties include unwanted intrusion into community life, potentially altering the nature of the programme, occupying the Community Builders' time and the challenge of following residents up to get valid pre and post data.

Methods

The evaluation aimed to draw on and triangulate different sources of evidence, including the learning captured by pathfinder sites. The main sources of evidence were qualitative primary research, monitoring reports and evidence collected by Community Builders (See Appendix 2 Data Sources Flow Chart).

A pilot Social Return on Investment (SROI) using data from two pathfinder sites was also undertaken – this is described in more detail in Section 5. At the time of commissioning it was not known whether this method would be possible as it had not previously been utilised for this type of project. There were two final summative workshops to bring together and test emerging findings.

All pathfinder sites were included in the summative workshops, the self-evaluation workshops and the monitoring reports. More in-depth qualitative primary research was undertaken with six pathfinder sites – see later in this section for the sample chosen and the rationale.

The main evaluation methods were:

i) Qualitative community-based research with pathfinder sites:

Qualitative research was undertaken with a sample of six pathfinder sites. The original aim was to take a naturalistic approach to data collection (Silverman, 2006), starting with visits to meet Community Builders and get to know the organisations and people involved (Sharpe et al., 2000). Data on the area, how the project was working, and outcomes were collected using recognised community-based methods:

- A community walk to allow the Community Builder to explain the key features and assets of the community (Sharpe et al., 2000)
- A follow up in-depth interview with the Community Builder to elicit how ABCD works, how assets are mobilised and strengthened and what, if any, outcomes have resulted

- Group discussions with Community Connectors and others involved in the project as staff or participants.

Interviews / community walks were initially done in person, but the pandemic had a major impact on fieldwork (see section 6) and later interviews had to be conducted by phone. This particularly affected the data collection with Connectors and residents, as this aspect of the evaluation had been planned for Spring 2020 - the height of the first lockdown.

See appendices 3 & 4 for interview guides. Interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed.

ii) Qualitative interviews with stakeholders

Qualitative research with pathfinder sites was supplemented with semi-structured telephone interviews with 10 key stakeholders. The sample was agreed with the Leeds City Council ABCD team and included members of that team, other council services and allied organisations in Leeds. This was added to the evaluation later when the importance of these perspectives was understood. These interviews explored the strategy of the programme, how it worked in reality, connections to other work and what the barriers and facilitators were. Interviews were recorded and full research notes taken.

The stakeholders included members of the ABCD team at Leeds City Council, senior management at Leeds City Council, partners in organisations external to Leeds City Council (e.g. the NHS), and managers in organisations using ABCD who aren't included in this programme's pathfinder sites.

iii) Secondary analysis and synthesis of monitoring data from the pathfinders

The Leeds City Council ABCD team collect a range of monitoring data to assess progress, including detailed reports, using a pro-forma, completed by the Community Builders and submitted every 3 months. Data was utilised from the 11 pathfinder sites that were submitting reports during the evaluation time period.

The monitoring data form changed during the evaluation period. One version was used from Autumn 2019 but, when the pandemic arrived in March 2020, this was amended, with the revised version used for two quarters, before reverting to the original. Slightly different information was collected in the different versions – see below.

In both versions of the form, qualitative data was collected relating to; what has been done, what has gone well, what challenges have existed, any stories relating to the three outcomes, contacts made and future priorities. Qualitative data covering the period between October 2019 and September

2020 was utilised in this evaluation. This was coded in NVivo and fed into the overall qualitative analysis (see later in this section).

The quantitative data collected was as follows:

- Community Connectors – numbers of new / totals / with a learning disability. Collected in the original version of the form but not for two quarters during the pandemic.
- Numbers of ‘new self-sustaining groups’. Requested in both versions of the form.
- Members of groups. Requested in both versions of the form.

All this information was collected by the Leeds ABCD team and collated into a ‘dash-board’.

Whilst every effort was made to produce a form that would be completed and collected consistently, limitations exist, as listed below:

- **Definitions** of what is or is not counted are likely to vary between sites. Some sites may use a broader definition than others. In relation to Connectors, for example, is someone attending a group a Connector, or do they only become one when they start helping out? In relation to groups, some sites, for example, included social media group members or residents who attended a meeting whilst others appear not to.
- **Attribution.** It is not always clear whether the groups, in particular, can be attributed to ABCD. The approach involves both helping new activities to be set up and unearthing existing assets. This poses challenges when counting. This is exacerbated by the close relationship with the Neighbourhood Organisations - it is not always clear if a project is attributable to ABCD or the work of the organisation in general. Sites are likely to have taken different approaches as to what is / is not included.
- **Incomplete** data. Community Connector numbers were not collected for two quarters. Also, numbers of members are frequently not included in the monitoring forms. One reason for this could be because the groups are self-sustaining - meaning the Community Builder may not have this information. This could potentially underestimate the number of people engaged with ABCD.

Given the above limitations, our approach to using the quantitative data from the monitoring forms is as follows:

- Data is presented for Connectors and for Groups from the first quarter of 2019/20 to the second quarter of 2020/21 i.e. six quarters or 18 months. This includes the period when Connector numbers were not collected. Numbers are taken directly from the Leeds City Council dashboard.
- Numbers of members are not taken from the dashboard, due principally to the amount of missing data. Instead a potential range is given, calculated by multiplying the number of groups by a 'typical' number of members per group (10-15 people). This gives a sense of scale but not a precise number. The 'typical' number was chosen based on our conversations with Community Builders and knowledge of community groups. There are one or two groups that are far bigger (e.g. one has 80 members) but these are rare.

This data is threaded into the findings in Section 3.

In addition to the Monitoring Data reports, Community Builders are encouraged to collect individual case studies as part of the self-evaluation of their project. These were not included in the university evaluation as it was not possible to be certain re the level of consent attained.

iv) Support to ABCD pathfinders to help them self-evaluate

Building on the initial evaluation workshop in July 2019, two further evaluation workshops were held with Community Builders in November 2019 and February 2020. These participatory workshops were designed to develop the evaluation skills of Community Builders so they could capture their local journey, and this could feed into the evaluation. Eight Community Builders attended plus some Managers and Leeds City Council staff.

Participants considered what methods they could use, including visual and participatory methods, and how to collect and share information in line with ethical principles of research. They agreed to capture one piece of evidence that illustrated positive change in relation to the three outcomes for an individual, group or the wider neighbourhood and to send this to LBU to include in the overall evaluation.

Three months after the workshops the research team contacted Community Builders to offer additional support and to ask for updates on pledges. As this coincided with the arrival of the pandemic (see section 6) the research team agreed to make it clear they understood the changing context may make completion of pledges difficult.

Three pledges were provided to the research team and are included in this report. One is a video interview with a Connector that is summarised as a case study in Box 9. Another is a diagram

illustrating connections made (Figures 7 & 8), in Section 3c. The third, a case study, feeds into the SROI in Section 5.

v) Final summative learning & evaluation workshops

Two learning and evaluation workshops were held in November 2020. These were a chance for the research team to share early findings with the Leeds City Council ABCD team and Community Builders from all the pathfinder sites. Due to the pandemic restrictions, these workshops were conducted as two online meetings of 1 ½ hours with opportunities for group discussion on key topics.

In order to encourage attendance, a 'goody bag' was posted out beforehand and attendees were given an opportunity to test the technology. This was successful, with 12 Community Builders attending both events.

Emergent themes were shared at the event, supplemented by detailed notes. This element of respondent validation, with opportunities to confirm or challenge the findings, is important for building the Leeds ABCD story.

Sample

The sample of pathfinder sites to include in primary qualitative data collection was agreed with the Leeds City Council ABCD team to reflect the different stages and start dates of the pathfinders and to give a spread in terms of type of area and establishment of the project. Data collection was phased:

- Phase 1 – Three embedded sites where ABCD methods have been working for a time (LS14 - Seacroft, New Wortley - Armley, BAFF - Beeston)
- Phase 2 – Three emerging sites where ABCD has recently been developed (hft - Horsforth, Community First Yorkshire - Rothwell and Opal - Cookridge)

Out of 11 pathfinder sites funded at the time, six were included in primary data collection. Three were excluded as they were not managed by the Adults and Health directorate. Initially it was planned to hold a further round of data collection with any outlier sites. Ultimately this was not possible, due to the reasons give above, plus at that time there were Community Builder vacancies and some had been furloughed due to the pandemic.

The sample strategy was aimed at collecting a range of perspectives within the pathfinders and in the programme including: ABCD Community Builders; Community Connectors, managers and staff supporting ABCD and other stakeholders. The final sample is given in Table 1. We intended to also interview residents active in their community however, the fieldwork had to change substantially with the pandemic (see section 6).

Table 1: Data Collection sample

Respondent Type	Data Collected
Primary Data	
Community Builders	4 face to face interviews with community walk (pre pandemic) 2 telephone interviews (post pandemic)
Community voice	2 focus groups (pre pandemic) 4 telephone interviews with Community Connectors (post pandemic)
Stakeholders	10 telephone interviews (post pandemic)
Secondary Data	
Monitoring Data qualitative	– 38 quarterly or end of year reports from 11 sites (pre and post pandemic). From October 2019 to September 2020 i.e. 11 months.
Monitoring Data quantitative	- Extracted from the Leeds City Council 'dashboard'. From Q1 2019/20 to Q2 2020/21 i.e. 18 months.
Self-Evaluation	Three pledges returned – a case study, an interview (video) and a diagrammatic representation of relationships / connections

Data analysis

Qualitative findings from the pathfinder sites were analysed using NVivo software to help with systematic coding and organisation.

Two thematic charts were developed collaboratively by the research team to reflect the story of the pathfinders using the initial framework of the research questions plus other emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

One thematic chart was at pathfinder site level and featured 23 top line themes plus sub-categories. All the transcripts from the interviews with Community Builders, Connectors and residents were coded against these themes as well as the qualitative data from the monitoring forms.

A further thematic chart was developed for the stakeholder interviews covering themes relating to the ABCD programme. This contained 11 top-line themes plus 21 sub-categories. Notes from the stakeholder interviews were coded against these themes.

This rigorous process enabled the team to identify major themes and commonalities / variations across sites and helps ensure the validity of the findings presented in Sections 3 and 4.

In addition to the above, profiles of six pathfinder sites are presented as Section 3a. These are a summary of data relating to the Community Builder, the place, the 'starting point' as well as key challenges, enabling factors and learning.

As the data collected is limited in scope and timeframe, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the relative success of specific sites. However, by investigating across sites, major themes, common change mechanisms and outcomes have been identified. Where possible, an indication of whether these themes are widespread or more specific is provided.

The final stage was a synthesis of findings from all parts of the evaluation mapped against the Leeds City Council ABCD evaluation framework and checked in the learning & evaluation events. We used the findings to identify areas where evidence is strong and well supported by data, unanticipated outcomes and gaps in evidence.

Ethical considerations

The evaluation received ethical approval through the Leeds Beckett University Research Ethics process. Although this community-based evaluation was relatively low risk, there were some ethical issues where we needed to put safeguards in place. These included:

- Balancing researchers intruding into community life with the need to be transparent about what we are doing and where information would go. Information about the evaluation was given to all pathfinders to distribute (Appendix 5) and people attending local activities were informed about researchers attending. A postcard was developed for people who the researcher may have engaged with during visits or community walks (Appendix 6). Full written consent was obtained for the walks, and for individual and group interviews (Appendix 7).
- The use of quarterly monitoring reports, which were collated by Leeds City Council, contained rich accounts of activity and could include information about individuals or groups. With Leeds City Council, we developed a standard process and template to ensure that everyone was aware that the reports would be passed to the research team. Monitoring reports were stored on password protected systems and systematically anonymised following analysis.
- We agreed not to use individual case studies, collected as part of the Leeds City Council monitoring process, as we could not guarantee that consent procedures met University ethical guidelines.

- Reporting and anonymity. The pathfinder sites are not anonymised in this report, but we have chosen to present the findings and quotations in ways that preserve the anonymity of individuals, e.g. using pseudonyms where necessary.

Box 3: Learning and Evaluation Events (November 2020)

The learning & evaluation events brought together Community Builders, staff involved in the Leeds City Council ABCD programme and the research team. The primary purpose was to create a collaborative space where participants could do a ‘reality check’ on interim findings and discuss the implications for research and practice. Discussions across both events focused on how ABCD works in Leeds and what has been learnt so far (see Appendix 8).

Event 1 looked specifically at the interim evaluation findings on the pathfinders. Discussions were based around three themes that were important issues needing further clarity:

- Evidence on community-level change from the pathfinders – what outcomes and impacts have been most evident?
- Asset mapping - practice versus theory
- What makes a Community Connector?

Event 2 focused on learning from the Leeds ABCD programme and future directions. Interim findings on the stakeholder interviews and the SROI pilot were presented. Discussions were grouped around three questions:

- Thinking about ABCD as a programme across Leeds, what are the key ingredients needed to do ABCD well and at scale?
- How can you best capture positive changes to demonstrate ABCD works?
- Thinking about the future – 5 years ahead, how can the ABCD approach be spread beyond the pathfinders?

Participants reflected on the key ingredients needed and what spreading ABCD really means. Some suggestions were made for future development of ABCD. Boxes summarising the main discussion points at the Learning Events are included in the findings sections and at appropriate points throughout this report.

Learning Networks

A final aspect of the evaluation was a facilitated Learning Network. This relates to the objective to “*facilitate shared learning on the development, implementation, leadership and evaluation of ABCD as a city initiative.*” As a contribution to this, learning support was designed and offered to Leeds City

Council managers to help support both reflection on implementation and to explore ideas for wider development.

In total, five learning sessions were provided across a period of 4 months each lasting for 2.5 hours; two managers were involved with a third joining partially. These meetings were both face to face, via video conferencing and telephone. In terms of the learning process, a modified action learning approach was agreed with participants which involved presenting an issue related to implementation or development of the assets model. In turn, participants would offer reflection and commentary on the issue as a way of generating new insights for personal learning and to support confidence building in the management and implementation of the 'new way forward'. A second element of the sessions was to supplement this reflective practice with knowledge resources, articles, reports and research summaries to create opportunities for 'knowledge interaction' as a two way process between the 'on the job' experiential knowledge and the developmental, new approaches to practice.

The topics raised and discussed in the sessions coalesced on some key themes, examples being:

- Measuring impact and benefits – what counts as evidence, how does this need to evolve?
- Seeking greater spread and reach across the city system – what are the challenges and mechanisms that could support this goal?
- Mainstreaming asset-based approaches into wider council teams/departments – why this is important? What might it look like and where could we start?

To conclude, this was a collaborative evaluation in keeping with the ABCD approach. Methods included the collection and analysis of primary qualitative data to give an in-depth understanding of the Leeds programme, an SROI to establish potential social values, plus the inclusion of secondary data provided by Community Builders to ascertain activity levels. Learning was shared and discussed with key informants to improve validity.

A key limitation is that, with the arrival of pandemic, the ability of the team to reach Connectors and residents to discuss the impact on their lives and communities was severely constrained. Another is that whilst monitoring data was provided, issues relating to definition, attribution and missing data affect its validity. The nature and complexity of the ABCD approach renders collecting information on reach and participation extremely challenging.








Section 3: Pathfinder Sites

This section draws together key findings relating to pathfinder sites. Summary profiles of the six pathfinder sites that participated in the primary qualitative data collection are presented in Section 3a. Process related themes (how the ABCD approach worked in Leeds) are presented in Section 3b whilst themes relating to outcomes are in Section 3c.








Findings are drawn principally from data collected via the pathfinder sites themselves (e.g. interviews with Community Builders, Connectors and residents, and Monitoring Data) though, where relevant, information from stakeholder interviews is included. Themes from the learning events are also presented, in marked boxes. All the numbers presented are from the Leeds City Council ABCD dashboard.

As this is qualitative data, citing numbers of responses is not considered appropriate. However, whenever possible, a sense of how widespread the opinion is, is given. Later in the report, the findings are mapped to the Theory of Change and the strength of evidence is evaluated (Section 7). Learning from across the evaluation is discussed in Section 8.








Section 3a: Pathfinder sites summary profiles

Profile: Site A	
	Community Builder: New to the post and community development work but had previous experience in the voluntary sector. Lives in the area.
	Patch: Large area (a small town as opposed to a suburb), many older people and young families, desirable place to live but has pockets of deprivation.
	Base: Working from home. The Neighbourhood Organisation does not have office space and there isn't a community centre.
	Starting point: Community Builder made links with key people and organisations to expand reach and so that they would direct residents to the Builder, regularly attending food bank and community gatherings.
	Strengths: Well-connected across the area from the food bank to the town council; intensive work with individuals that has had significant outcomes for those people and a knock-on effect as they begin to connect with others; supports individuals to use their assets and link to others.
	Challenges: Lone working with no base; emphasis on people with learning disabilities; when supporting individuals, where is the line between Builders and support worker?
	Learning: Starting from scratch without building on previous community development work takes a long time and not having a community centre or other base requires the Community Builder to work hard to chase every lead to meet all of the active residents who can link into the work. On the plus side, the worker has a blank canvas and can follow the energy without being tied to traditional approaches and focused on group activities at a centre.








Profile: Site B

	Community Builder: Two Builders who have been doing community development work in the area for over 20 years and know each other well.
	Patch: A walkable area which is part of a larger suburb. It is a disadvantaged area which residents feel gets a bad press and workers describe the population as resilient. The community is ethnically diverse.
	Base: A community centre in a prime location, although for the majority of the evaluation a new centre was being built so they were located off-patch. The library served as an important community space for the project.
	Starting point: The Builders were very familiar with the area and people. They made an easy read leaflet and 'discovery' questionnaire to inform people about the project, raise interest and find out their interests and skills. They promoted ABCD at a local festival.
	Strengths: They were both from this community, one still lives in the area; they are trusted and have strong connections in the community; having two Builders provides support and a shared workload.
	Challenges: Residents' safety concerns can deter them from getting involved in things; the Builders were based in a temporary office which wasn't central and had IT issues; the weather when trying to work without a place to meet.
	Learning: Established community workers have an advantage when they already have a good knowledge of the people and place and have already built up trust. It can be challenging to change the way they work after many years supporting the community and Builders may feel they know the assets from experience without including the residents in the mapping. It is possible to do ABCD without a base but the British weather has to be taken into consideration when planning outdoor activities/events, mapping assets and making connections. The library was a valuable asset helping to fill this gap.








Profile: Site C

	Community Builder: The Builder has been doing community development work at the local charity for 10 years and has lived in the area all her life.
	Patch: A walkable area with green space and several community meeting places. The area is categorised as 'deprived,' but it has a strong, long-term community who have pride in their neighbourhood. Infrastructure such as shops, pubs and cafes has declined over the years.
	Base: A community centre in the heart of the community. A bright, welcoming space with a café, offices, and rooms for groups to meet in.
	Starting point: The Builder is very familiar with the area, people, and assets and she is a familiar face in the community. Following the ABCD training, the Builder started to change the way she worked from delivering to supporting people to use their skills and experience.
	Strengths: The organisation and Builder were already trusted by the community and the Builder knew the area well; a well-established centre as a base; they developed a strong pathway from participant to volunteer and employment opportunities.
	Challenges: It can be difficult for residents build confidence and to adapt to being more proactive; finding cheap/free, accessible spaces for people to meet and organise groups; community tensions and anti-social behaviour.
	Learning: When an existing organisation which is well respected by residents adopts ABCD, their capacity can increase greatly as residents take on responsibilities and roles. With trust already established and a well-known central base, the work can take off more quickly than if the worker had to build these foundations. A change from the Builder trying to deliver everything to facilitating community ideas and activities led by residents is transformative for the individual and for the community they serve.








Profile: Site D

	Community Builder: New to community development, previously worked at a local charity. Has lived locally for a long time - knows the area well and is embedded in the community. She is involved in other community initiatives.
	Patch: The original patch is small - c350 houses and 4 tower blocks. It is a 'priority area.' Much of the housing and the environment is poor quality / not well cared for. It is close to the city centre but feels cut off. Crime levels are high e.g. drugs, burglaries, vandalism. People lack trust and can be unwilling to engage. There are some local services but few shops in the original patch. The lack of engagement led to the patch being broadened out to include a busy shopping centre where people are more willing to talk. Residents include new arrivals from Eastern Europe and more long-term residents.
	Base: Well established popular community centre in the heart of the area. Multiple activities and programmes run as well as a café and a charity shop. Lots of people popping in and out.
	Starting point: Spent time building up a trusting relationship with the community. Works with individuals, often with a high level of need, listening and supporting. Identifies their interests and supports them to form groups.
	Strengths: The community centre provides a warm, welcoming, accessible place for individuals and groups to meet. The Builder is well known and trusted and able to build connections. Individuals were supported in setting up a range of social and activity related groups.
	Challenges: A breakdown in the relationship between the Builder and the Neighbourhood Organisation led to them withdrawing as a pathfinder site. Different styles of working and personal differences led to a breakdown in trust. It was hard to engage with people living in the original patch – lack of trust, language barriers and crime contributed to this. Tower blocks not publicly accessible. The Builder found lone working hard and there was a blurring of work and personal life.
	Learning: The relationship between the Builder and the Neighbourhood Organisation is key. They need to be able to work together in a mutually beneficial and trusting way. A 'patch' with significant challenges means it takes time to build trust. Some issues are substantive and could benefit from external input (e.g. crime / housing).

Profile: Site E

	<p>Community Builder: She lives in a different city but is from Leeds originally. The patch is brand new to her, she knew no-one to start with. She is new to community development work having previously worked in admin and as a teaching assistant. She is skilled at making connections quickly (having moved a lot herself) and believes being from Leeds is important.</p>
	<p>Patch: A semi-rural town (c24,000 people) with a thriving centre and lots going on. People are proud of their town, often returning to live there. Most are White British – some working class, others more affluent. People can be quite insular and unwilling to engage with outsiders – some questioned the presence / role of the Builder.</p>
	<p>Base: There is no base for the Builder in the area as the Neighbourhood Organisation is located elsewhere. This makes it hard for the Builder as she is less likely to naturally bump into people and residents don't know where to find her.</p>
	<p>Starting point: As she was new to the area the Builder spent a few months familiarising herself by walking around, networking and attending events. She used asset mapping to get to know the area and to start conversations. So people knew where to find her, she started being in a certain place at a certain time. She also used social media (particularly Facebook) and advertising to generate connections.</p>
	<p>Strengths: The Builder has been able to make contact with local people who wish to start and run activities. By explaining her role, she has managed to overcome some initial resistance to her. Her managers have been very supportive and flexible. Lacking a base has meant she's been 'forced' to get out and about. Being from Leeds was important to becoming accepted in the area.</p>
	<p>Challenges: Some people – including key influencers – were not initially welcoming. There was already a lot going on, with other people running activities, so coming in from outside was "tricky". Lacking a base and not living in the area has made it difficult to bump into people naturally. This has become even more difficult since the pandemic began when the Builder has not been able to be present in the area.</p>
	<p>Learning: Lacking a base and not living locally makes establishing connections more challenging and time consuming – however, given time and personal skills it can be achieved. Some areas can be suspicious of outsiders so being clear about the role and sensitive to local dynamics is important. Even in areas with existing activities, more individuals can be drawn into the community via existing groups.</p>

Profile: Site F

	Community Builder: She is interested in communities and the living environment and lives nearby. Recent roles have been strategic - working 'on the ground' in community development is new to her.
	Patch: The Neighbourhood Organisation covers a large area of Leeds, so it was decided to focus initially on one estate. Built in the 1950s, this is now an area of deprivation and many facilities have shut. The decline of the physical and social infrastructure was a common theme. Community spirit is low, there is some anti-social behaviour and residents can be fearful. The population is mainly White British and working class – some families have lived there for generations - with some new arrivals. Residents are described as quite insular. Many are occupied with hardship struggles - this reduces their capacity and readiness to engage with community activities.
	Base: The community centre, where the Neighbourhood Organisation is based, mainly caters for older people from across a wide area of Leeds running many varied social activities. Due to the older age range some residents don't see it as being 'for them.'
	Starting point: The Builder has taken an intergenerational approach. She has tried to build connections between the local community and the centre. She hand delivered postcards encouraging residents to get involved in ABCD and inviting them to community involvement events. She has worked with groups and organisations to improve the physical environment around the centre to make it more appealing.
	Strengths: Concentrating on one area has helped focus the efforts of the Builder. Some local people have stepped forward with ideas and groups have been set up. Having a safe public space (the community centre) has meant there is somewhere to meet and organise activities and events.
	Challenges: Getting people involved, particularly in setting up and running activities has been difficult. 'Community readiness' is low, and residents are occupied with "survival." Some dropped out due to difficult personal circumstances and fallings out. A lack of physical infrastructure means there are limited 'bumping' opportunities and the community as a whole lacks cohesion. The community centre is seen as for older people and not everybody living locally. The Builder has limited hours for such a demanding role.
	Learning: Working in areas where many people are struggling and there is a lack of cohesion is possible, but it takes time for residents to get involved and their engagement may ebb and flow as their circumstances change. Having a safe public space is critical in areas without other facilities.

Section 3b: How does ABCD work in pathfinder sites?

Context

This section presents findings regarding the neighbourhoods where pathfinder sites were located. This is important as it is likely to affect how ABCD works practically. Attempts are made to identify emerging patterns about how context shaped the development of the programme (see also Table 3: Key Barriers and Challenges within Pathfinder Sites).

The Leeds ABCD model was originally trialled in three areas. When it expanded to 12 pathfinder sites the intention was to include a broad mix of areas, including some identified as 'priority neighbourhoods' (i.e. having a high level of deprivation), some that were more suburban and others that were more village-like. This variety is apparent when exploring the context of the sites. Some areas are 'thriving' communities – one was voted as being in the 'top 10 places to live in the UK' - whilst many others can be described as 'struggling'. The variety however is more multi-dimensional than just affluence vs. deprivation – other aspects include the type of housing and the physical environment, ethnicity, the permanence of the population and levels of cohesion. Pathfinder neighbourhoods include traditional White working-class areas (sometimes ex-mining communities), ethnically diverse inner-city areas, ex 'council' estates and neighbourhoods dominated by social housing tower blocks. Some of the neighbourhoods have a very transient population (for example housing asylum seekers / ex-prisoners), whilst others have long-term, multi-generational communities.

Community **infrastructure** varies greatly. Approximately half the areas have shops, pubs and cafes where people can meet and interact, whilst in the other areas the decline of this infrastructure is felt keenly. In these latter areas, community centres were particularly important. Participants from struggling areas talked about how pubs / schools have shut or become housing whilst shopping areas had shrunk to perhaps one supermarket. This lessened the opportunities for bumping into other local people and having conversations.

"So the school closed, the post office closed, over time the pub became more and more run down and, you know, really struggling eventually closed. (...) And I think it's recognised that these 1950s estates, the design of them, doesn't necessarily lend themselves very well to community interaction" (Community Builder Interview, Site 6)

In a few neighbourhoods, some residents felt more wary and **less safe** than in the past. They were uncomfortable going to certain areas, e.g. parks, on their own. It was suggested that the lack of activities for young people had led to an increase in anti-social behaviour.

“And there was a youth club on X Road, my children used to go to the youth club, that was a big community thing and it kept them off the streets, it gave them something to do. Now that youth club closed down, most of the local clubs closed down and I don’t think there’s that sense of community, a lot where a woman could safely go on her own or feel she could go on her own.” (Resident, Site 2)

In one particularly deprived area, people were described as being unwilling to open their doors to speak to others. It had once been a desirable place to live but an increase in crime (particularly drug-dealing) meant this was no longer the case.

Community **‘togetherness’** also varied between areas. In some areas, people talked about ‘pulling together’; for example, in one struggling area a high-profile incident that had threatened their diverse community led to people becoming more united. In other areas, it related to long-term residents looking out for each other. In some places, however, this ‘togetherness’ was no longer felt. In one area, this was ascribed to a lack of community facilities and activities - schools and pubs had shut and once popular community activities no longer ran as public infrastructure had become private. In another area, tensions existed and this was put down to high crime levels and potentially different groups of transient struggling residents housed together.

“How it used to be in X, it was vibrant, it was the place to be” (Community Connector, Site 6)

A willingness to be **involved** in community activities and life emerged in some areas. This is potentially more widespread in the thriving areas, but examples of committed and active citizens also existed in struggling areas.

There was an awareness in many places of their circumstances being less favourable than other nearby locations – leading to a **‘them and us’** feeling. One participant spoke about how she wanted her neighbourhood to have green space as good as the more affluent neighbouring area. This has been the driving force to setting up an ‘In Bloom’ group. In one struggling area, the difference between their own circumstances and that of the clearly visible City Centre was stark.

“And in terms of a comparison with X in Bloom, for instance, we’re adjacent to Y which is, you know, [...] in Y there’s an in-bloom group with dozens of members doing all sorts of different projects. You know, it’s a completely different community dynamic.” (Community Connector, Site 6)

There was a strong negative reaction in many of the struggling communities to being **labelled** as ‘deprived’ or problematic. Residents could feel stigmatised by the media and looked down on by people living elsewhere. Participants acknowledged there were problems but felt this related to a minority of people and that deprivation statistics did not capture the whole picture. They were protective of their area - expressing their pride in it and emphasising there were ‘good’ people living there and positive activities taking place.

“Yeah ok we might be on our arse and skint but we still get on and we know what we are doing. People manage because they do, and that’s how life is.(...). I just don’t like it when they say, there is a high population of unemployment. Yeah there is, but there is also a lot of good community people around here that are trying to support one another” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

“Every time you pick a paper up or something, they are disrespecting people in X and the area, they say it’s a violent area. (...) I’ve been here over 50 years now, and I wouldn’t say stay in a place where I didn’t think it was safe or, I don’t know, the people are great” (Community Builder Interview, Site 2)

Challenges relating to context are listed below. Whilst there are no absolutes, patterns emerged in terms of where these challenges are more problematic:

- a lack of trust within the area – particularly in areas with low levels of ‘togetherness’ / high levels of crime / anti-social behaviour.
- a lack of trust of outsiders (e.g. the Community Builder) – more common in ‘inward looking’ long-term communities

“but in X they are quite an insular type of people as well, I know that probably sounds a little bit horrible but it’s not. They’re not very good at accepting people from outside, until they realise that they are there for a good reason, so anybody else coming in there a little bit standoffish but once you gain their trust, then it’s like you’ve just been brought into the fold it’s really really nice” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

- fear – particularly in struggling communities

“There are a lot of people who sell drugs in there, so they are not going to open their doors anyway.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

- scepticism – more common in communities who have experienced many initiatives before that have come and gone
- language – where many are spoken
- financial hardship and excess work hours – more common in struggling communities where people may work multiple jobs
- overlap with other organisations / committed individuals – more common in ‘thriving’ areas

“it’s quite a thriving sort of town, it’s got lots of things that are already happening there a lot of key players who are already very active in getting things going and having lots of groups all organised and things so coming has been a little bit tricky in that respect” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

To summarise, great variation exists between neighbourhoods in terms of levels of poverty, community togetherness, the quantity / quality of infrastructure and the severity of problems faced. Struggling communities are aware of the differences between their area and more affluent ones – they feel the unfairness of this but do not wish to be defined by it.

Mechanisms

ABCD Approach

Community Builders were generally **positive** about the ABCD approach or ‘way of working’ and they felt that most residents and organisations agreed with the ethos, once it was explained to them.

“Generally, people like what they hear, and it makes sense to them” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

One aspect of the approach highlighted was **listening** to people, uncovering what their **interests** are and **connecting** them to others, as a way of bringing the community together.

“It’s about listening to people and using what their interests are and what they believe that they would like to do and finding somebody who is like-minded.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

The most discussed aspect of ABCD was its **‘bottom-up’** nature. This involves people in the community being supported to make things happen, based on their aspirations, rather than someone else doing it for them. This was a shift in how some organisations work:

“We started it off as listening and responding whereas ABCD is listening and supporting” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4).

ABCD also increases the capacity of the community as actions did not rely on a community development worker.

“you really wanna do this, I’m here to support you, but I’m going to support you to run this, this is going to be your baby, this is going to be your project and we are going to support you to run it’ and that’s how actually it’s changed the way I work.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

This empowering aspect of ABCD was felt to be more difficult for certain communities who require additional support. Examples included people with learning disabilities and those communities which are struggling with hardship and a lack of supportive structures. Some Community Builders questioned whether the community were at a sufficient state of ‘readiness’ for ‘pure’ ABCD.

“So I agree with it completely, you know, however, I would say that when you’re starting from a depressed base in terms of, not just the existing community infrastructure and the disillusion of a cohesive strong community, erm, the fact that the people that, who most need this, are just so occupied with other things and survival. And then there’s the fear and people keeping to themselves.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 6)

The ABCD focus on the **positives** of the community was welcomed by all, even those in the most deprived neighbourhoods. A final positive aspect of the approach was its flexible nature and that it is

not overly focused on outcomes. It was emphasised that what works in one area may not work in another and the approach needed to be adapted to suit.

One reservation was the **jargon** surrounding it, this was mentioned by approximately half of the Community Builders as being off-putting for residents. It is also seen as being counter to its bottom up nature. To overcome this, they tended to use more colloquial terms or names.

“Once you start using terms like ABCD and community development it does feel a bit top down, even though it’s meant to be the opposite.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 6)

“My first Community Connector was happy to do some outreach and help with other things until I called her a Community Connector. After this she refused to do anymore saying “Why am I doing the work you are getting paid for? Following this, I have identified several people who are happy to reach out without them being called a Community Connector.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

“I had to say all the jargon, you know, this is this, I’m a Community Builder, you’re a Community Connector, but now it’s you’re [name], you’ve got some skills, do you want some money? Let’s kick it off (...) It does influence change but we don’t have to label everything, it’s people doing what they want to do for the good of the community” (Stakeholder H)

Other issues include:

- The difficulty in finding people to lead activities when communities are more used to being provided with services
- Blurred boundaries for the Community Builder - between being a community worker and a support worker
- Organisations feeling that they ‘already do that’ i.e. work in an ABCD way.

Assets

Themes of physical, social and individual assets emerged during discussions with Community Builders and residents.

Individuals and their **skills** were identified by some Builders as the “No. 1” asset. Sometimes these need ‘teasing out’ as people do not always appreciate their skills or believe in themselves. People’s stories of the community were also felt to be important.

“You have got to show somebody that they have got that skill really. Because if they can’t see it for their own self they don’t think that. There’s a lot of people who, who don’t think they’ve got any worth, so first of all you’ve got to make them believe in themselves.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 2)

“I thought well maybe I’ve got something to offer cos I mean I’m in my mid-seventies now and my grandma taught me to crochet when I were little so I’ve been doing crocheting and knitting and some sort of hobby art stuff and whatever you know all me life” (Resident, Site 2)

Physical assets cited include cafes, schools, libraries, pubs, green spaces, community centres, allotments, shops etc. The quantity and quality of these vary between sites – see context section earlier - and their accessibility is important. Some schools, for example, were not open to the broader community, and some community centres lacked bookable, affordable spaces. By contrast, some local cafes were seen as very accessible with a friendly atmosphere and flexible usage arrangements. Having owners that are ‘like-minded’ and willing to engage with community activities is key. Safety (or a lack of) was a key factor in the usefulness of a physical asset. Some parks and pubs felt unsafe due to anti-social or criminal activities. Finally, as flagged up earlier, some physical assets, particularly pubs and shops, were no longer available to the community.

“I use the contacts that I had, that I’d made in [neighbourhood] to find him a place so that he could set that up, they were fantastic the cafe in (site 8) is brilliant, (...), the guy who actually runs that, offers the room out for free.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

Community groups or **organisations** emerged as a key category of asset. In one area there was a proliferation of diverse organisations and groups operating locally. These included a social enterprise that taught local young people about motor mechanics, a residents’ group that organised social events and trips, a boxing club, a drama organisation and one that taught cookery skills. Whilst this area was categorised as ‘deprived,’ it had a strong, long-term community. This level of community activity was not apparent in all sites.

“I don’t know if it’s called a social enterprise. They have a board of trustees and they put on this provision for kids that aren’t doing really great in school and they go and learn motor mechanics. The kids sometimes are a bit challenging, a bit disruptive in school (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

An observation is that the physical, social and individual assets of an area can be seen to interweave and are dependent, to an extent, on each other. An individual with a skill (e.g. crocheting) needs both a social (a supportive group) and a physical setting (a library to meet in) for it to become an asset that others can gain from.

Asset Mapping

This aspect of ABCD was recognised by Community Builders as an important part of their role; however, nearly all were grappling with the reality of it – both how to do the mapping in a way that involves the community and the format of the final product.

"I mean I've heard so many different things about asset mapping. A right way and a wrong way or whichever way suits you is what I've sort of come to the conclusion with." (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

"There is millions of assets, a lot of that is in my head. It's just how to put it down." (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

Community Builders described **how** they undertook the mapping. This included walking around the area, taking photographs, having conversations with people and doing internet searches. Community directories existed in one or two areas that they could link into. Those new to the area were 'starting from scratch' whilst others already had in-depth knowledge of the community, having lived or work there for years. The Builders were keenly aware that these more individualistic methods did not involve the community in the process, and this did not fit with the ethos of ABCD.

"it's kind of sketchy at the moment trying to think of ways, trying to get my head around right I want to engage with the community around this asset mapping, not me just generate a list, because it just doesn't feel like it means anything. I mean if I created something and gave it out to the community they could use it, but that just doesn't feel like the best way to do it." (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

Methods that had been used to involve the community, in a minority of sites, included:

- A skills event – where residents could note down their own talents and interests
- A passport – as above, residents can write down their skills and their connections
- A Facebook page
- An interactive event at one site with young people to discuss local assets

"Whilst visiting the X Youth club I have also created a few community mapping workshops alongside fun activities. Though the numbers at Youth club became smaller during the winter period, mixing mapping conversations amongst word play games was a useful way to stimulate conversation and gain insight from young people how they feel about [the area]" (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 7)

The process of mapping helped the Community Builders to **get to know the area** and the people in it. This is especially true if they were new there, although even those with good knowledge said they found assets that they had previously been unaware of. The information was also used as a way of **signposting** people to assets, **assessing** what already existed to reduce overlap and identifying '**gaps**' in provision.

"It's just having that 'ohh' it's there, so now I know it's there and if there's groups that are running from these places, I can add that on the map so if anybody comes to me I can well actually, let me just check there, that's where you live. I'll have a look see what's going on in that centre there" (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

"We've gone out, we've spoken to people, we've had a good walk around the whole area, taking pictures. What exists, what does exist, what groups exist? We don't want to go reinvent everything, find out why these are important resources. So we have done the groundwork and

that was the first couple of months, you can't just dive in and say we're setting this up because you don't know what's needed" (Community Builder Interview, Site 2)

When used in an interactive way, asset mapping also served as a way of people thinking about their role in the community. Finally, it helped the Community Builders show people what they had been doing.

The **format** of the resulting maps varied. A board of images that could be displayed in the community had been produced by one site. Another Builder felt unable to do this type of display as they lacked a base in the community. On-line / virtual maps were being actively explored by several sites – one had a google map of assets whilst in other sites this type of approach was in development. These could then be shared with other agencies.

Ownership of the map emerged as a theme. Several Community Builders expressed the desire for the community to own it but were unsure who would be responsible for updating it. It was noted that, if a virtual map was utilised, it needed to be transferable to the community, should the Community Builder leave their post.

A final consideration is how to include more **intangible assets** on a community asset map. Individual skills / abilities are critical yet cannot be included on a publicly available document.

Box 4: Asset mapping – points from learning & evaluation event 1

Learning event participants were asked to discuss: what is important in asset mapping? Is it the map or the process? How does the practice compare to the theory? Who are the maps for?

Conclusions were:

- The process of asset mapping is more important than the outcome.
- Asset mapping is a 'bridge' to connect. A chance to have a conversation as a starting point.
- One Builder began by taking photos. Behind a building would be a story – a history. Photos were then put on a board, again stimulating further conversation and sharing memories.
- Going beyond 'word of mouth' to capturing information on local assets. Community Builders using Google maps and Excel spreadsheets. These are working documents that need to be updated.
- Challenge is how to share – and what's appropriate to share.
- Who's doing the maps and who is it for? An asset map is for local residents first and foremost, but it is also useful for engaging with other organisations
- An asset map is only as good as a Community Builder's knowledge. Were Community Connectors involved? Another view was that Community Builders know only part of the picture.
- Unless an asset map is a living, evolving piece of work, contributed to and used by the community there is not much benefit in having one.
- A practical tool but one which needs to be accessible. It's only good if it's used.
- Asset maps were used in the COVID-19 pandemic to help plan response and connect people.
- Digital ways of presenting being used, but also need physical copies in libraries for those who are not online.
- A source of information for everyone living and working in that community.

In summary, there is a good level of consistency regarding the ABCD approach. Listening to people, its 'bottom-up' nature, focusing on the positives were all emphasised. The approach needs to be adapted to suit different areas and the use of jargon minimised. Categories of assets include individuals and their skills, physical assets plus community groups or organisations. The reality of asset mapping has been challenging – whilst it has its uses, key questions remain, including how to involve the community in a meaningful way and the optimum format of the map.

Asset Mobilisation

This section focuses on the reality of mobilising assets in an area, using an ABCD approach. It presents information on how conversations were instigated, connections made and how Builders worked with individuals and groups.

- **Conversations / Building Connections**

Having conversations with individuals and organisations in order to build connections is a critical part of the Community Builder role. It was described by one site as weaving a '**spider's web**' of connections that work between and across each other - and not on their own.

The **approaches** that Community Builders felt worked best were those that are informal, flexible and respectful. Creating opportunities for relaxed conversations to take place, where individuals are willing to 'open up' is key. This could be whilst out and about in the neighbourhood or at their base by having a 'conversation and a cuppa'.

"it's not putting meetings in place and putting discussion groups on that work the best, it's just sort of random conversations that you have, people that walk through the door, people that come and have a cup of coffee in the café". (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

The Community Builder needs to work in a flexible way, for example, going to the pub or to church and this may not fit the normal '9-5'.

"It's about getting those places in, maybe cutting down hours during the week and going to church on a Sunday morning and talking to the people that go there, cause you don't always get to see people, you don't always see everybody Monday to Friday either, you do need to see people on a weekend." (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

Treating people as 'citizens' and not 'labels' is important, as is focusing on what people want to change in the area in order to frame the conversation in a positive way. Some connections or relationships take time to develop with multiple meetings, whilst others are far quicker and more straightforward.

Methods for establishing connections were similar across sites. Getting out into the community was universal. This included going to ‘bumping places’ such as events (e.g. markets), places (schools, cafes, religious venues) and, in one case, volunteering at a local charity.

More formal methods of instigating conversations and building connections were used by some. A couple of sites held specific ABCD events – drop-ins to talk about the area, stalls at community events, a celebratory AGM and a ‘skills’ event where people shared their talents and passions. One site distributed a ‘discovery’ questionnaire.

To support these efforts a variety of **media** were used to spread the word about ABCD, including:

- Noticeboards, posters and / or banners at community places
- Flyers distributed door to door, at events or via local organisations
- Local magazines and newsletters – in two cases Community Builders wrote articles
- Social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter, including linking with local organisations

Networking with other local organisations and key individuals was also important. This helps spread the word, garners support for ABCD and links them into existing activities.

“if you're on your own, in a community, and even one that isn't quite as big as this, I think you do need to gather support around, to kind of help to spread the word, if you are just one person having one conversation, one conversation, one conversation, it's kind of like, it's going to take a long time to kind of, grow that knowledge and get people interested” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

Networking groups, where different organisations all working in the same area or on the same issue got together, were set up in two sites. This had led to useful connections being made. In one site, ‘Patch Workers’ meetings had been held – from this a venue was found for one community project struggling to find a suitable place to meet and a community group, who was short of volunteers, was helped by another to recruit.

Community Builders engaged with many diverse organisations. Table 2 gives an overview by type.

Table 2: Organisations that Community Builders connected with

Neighbourhood Organisations	City wide or broader organisations
Local services e.g. schools, GPs, library, housing managers, police	Education e.g. universities / colleges
Religious groups or places	Hubs e.g. employment centres
Local businesses e.g. cafes, supermarkets, garden centres	Leeds City Council Services e.g. Parks, Active Leeds
Community groups – vast array including Residents’ Associations, Interest Groups (creative), Sporting Groups, Social Groups (from Brownies to older people), Green Space groups	City services e.g. housing, youth, employment
Local political institutions e.g. Councillors / Town Council	Health sector, including CCGs, Systems Change, Foundation Trusts, Mental Health Services
	Charities – TCV, Groundwork, Bereavement
	Other cities or areas wishing to embrace an ABCD approach

One issue identified is that there is a danger of working regularly with the same people, who may already know each other.

- **Working with Individuals**

Community Builders described their ‘asset-based’ work with individuals. Whilst every story is unique, a common **pattern or a ‘typical’ journey**, as described below, do emerge.

The Community Builder will meet the individual, often in an informal setting. This may be because of a particular issue or moment in life they are struggling with (e.g. accessing a food bank or being recently bereaved) or simply bumping into them at a café or in a community centre. The Community Builder will establish a relationship with them, if appropriate, signposting them to other services. They will look to identify a skill or an interest (e.g. they like tinkering with bikes or gardening). The individual is encouraged to form a connection with others orientated around their interests – it could involve attending a local group or meeting up with one other person. Individuals are encouraged to offer their skills to others or to follow their passion and take action to improve their community in a way that appeals to them. This could be ‘formal’ volunteering, e.g. helping out at a local community café, or they may be supported in undertaking community action themselves, e.g. starting to cook for neighbours or revitalising a flower bed. As this process progresses, the individual gains additional connections in the community and often increased confidence – see outcomes section.

How far people go along this journey varies - some are content with making one new connection or friendship, others become very involved in community life. Some people require quite intensive levels of support, others only need 'light-touch' support and temporary assistance – they then return to being independent.

Types of connections include:

- Linking two or more individuals together with similar interests e.g. two people who like fishing
“and then of course when I’m out and about and I think ‘yeah, so and so over there said they wanted to do that’. So, we introduce them, ‘cause you’ve got 2 people then that have got the same interests, you have more chance of a bigger group being formed.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)
- Matching a 'need' with a skill e.g. linking someone who is IT savvy with someone who is not
- Linking an individual with an organisation e.g. someone with gardening skills to an employment centre

Two examples of a personal journey are given below:

“C was in crisis 18 months ago. He started to access the centre for counselling and more informal chats over a cuppa. He was very lonely and had some financial problems that a support worker from the centre was able to sort out for him. Once he started to sleep better at night he started to feel at home at the centre and we saw positive improvements in his mental health. He still has good days and bad days but he is now better connected and has friends he can call for a chat. Through conversations we discovered that C used to be a joiner and was a keen gardener. He is now an active member of our Urban Task Force community gardening project and loves nothing more than sharing his skills with other members of the group.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

“T undertook art therapy at a local community centre. Once the sessions finished, she was introduced to other individuals at the community café. She said she liked cooking and catering. This led to volunteering in the café – initially for an hour, then all day. During the school holidays she made sandwiches and pack ups for children’s lunches.” (Resident – paraphrased content, Site 4)

Individuals talked about being motivated by wanting to give something back and needing a sense of purpose.

“Because I wanted to give back something that I’d had from here. I’ve been coming like four and a half years now so for me it’s giving back and getting people together that is important. (...) It gives you a purpose so I like to give people a purpose to be out and I think that that’s what, that’s why I do it yeah.” (Resident, Site 4)

Connectors are often very pro-active people who want to help the community. They are also often very busy people – and this can be a challenge.

Box 5 and Figures 2 & 3 present the monitoring data relating to Community Connectors.

Box 5: Community Connector Numbers

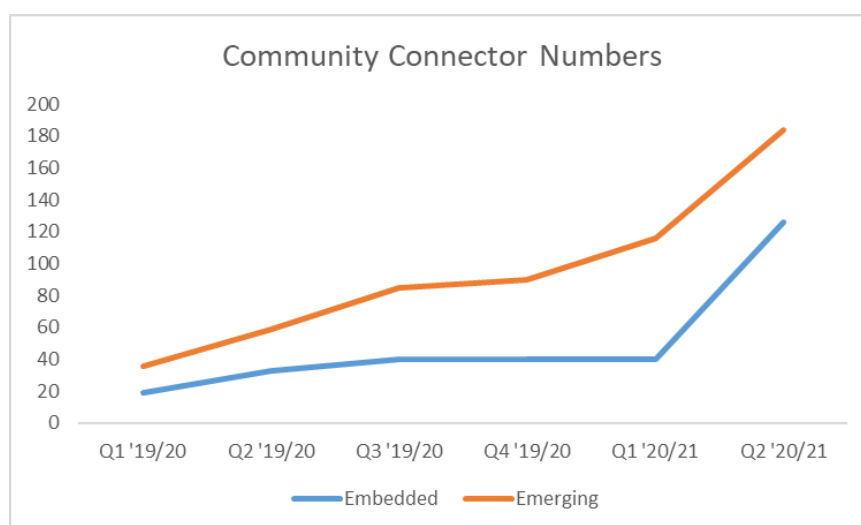
Monitoring data shows that between Quarter 1 2019/20 and Quarter 2 of 2020/21 (i.e. 6 quarters or 18 months) there were **310 new** Community Connectors in 11 pathfinder sites.

This is an average of **28.2 per site** with a **range from 5 to 110** (see Figure 3). The two sites with the lowest number of Connectors are:

- One that withdrew from the offer of continuation funding and reported no data after Q2 2019/20 (5 Connectors)
- One that has a learning disability 'lens' (6 Connectors).

The site with the highest number (n=110) is one of the embedded (early) pathfinders.

Figure 2: Total number of Community Connectors by quarter (From Q1 2019/20 to Q2 2020/21)
Embedded Sites (3 in total) compared to Emerging Sites (8 in total)



As mentioned in the methodology, Community Connector numbers were not collected for two quarters during the pandemic. This affects data from Q4 2019/20 and Q1 2020/21 (see Figure 2).

One of the embedded sites (Site 8 in Figure 3) withdrew from the offer of continuation funding, reporting no data after Q2 2019/20.

Figure 3: Total number of Community Connectors by site (Q1 2019/20 to Q2 2020/21)

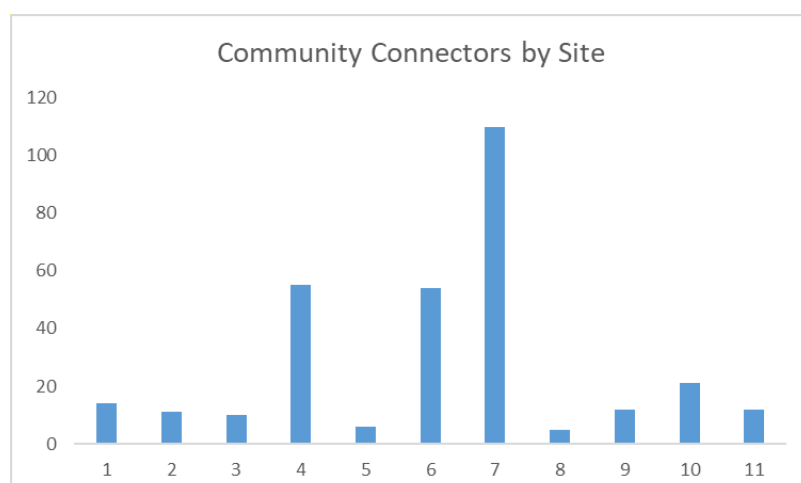


Figure 3 illustrates the wide variation in Connector numbers between sites. Sites 2,7 and 8 are the Embedded Sites.

A challenge for the Community Builders is how to work with individuals that either have multiple or complex needs or particularly challenging life circumstances in a way that is asset-based and not about providing long-term, individual support. This was most marked when working with people who had learning disabilities, as they face additional barriers to being able to action things themselves (e.g. organising a social activity). In another site, many needs-based conversations were held with individual residents (social, family or health issues). The challenge is how to ensure they receive much needed support but also re-orientate towards building connections and community action.

During the pandemic the work with individuals changed. It became more focused on helping people with essential needs (food / medication / dog walking), combatting isolation via buddies / regular contact, providing enriching activities for children, and addressing welfare needs.

Box 6: What makes a good Community Connector? From learning & evaluation event 1

- Genuine person who is trusted
- Talented and committed people with knowledge of area
- Someone to hand over ownership to the community. An alternative view is that the community already owns its place and Community Connectors are not in a position to hand anything over.
- Community Connectors help people recognise the tools they have so they can start to fulfil their aspirations. Discovery questions help people understand their assets and skills.
- How are people identified as Community Connectors? Depends on the person – some people do it naturally.
- Don't always need a conversation to 'label' someone as a Community Connector, but for some, having a badge helps them in their role in community building.
- Mix of Connectors in the community.

- **Working with Groups**

Many new groups were set up (see Section 3b for the monitoring data numbers) and are now run by residents. In addition, some existing groups were strengthened with additional support, affiliations and members. Listing all of these is not possible, instead categories, or types of groups (with some overlap) are listed below.

- **Interest or skill orientated groups.** Perhaps the most common type emanating from ABCD. Examples include arts and crafts, games, jigsaws, creative writing, reading and amateur dramatic groups, plus a choir.
- **Social groups.** These include an Asian Women's Group, A Friday Night Social and a Men's Social Club. Some cater for a specific population (e.g. men) whilst others are neighbourhood based e.g. 'Seacroft Sociable Folk.'
- **Physical activity groups,** including bike riding, Tai Chi, walking, swimming.
- **Altruistic groups.** Examples include the 'Cookalong' Club that provide meals and cooking skills for families experiencing poverty, a Women's Group for those experiencing domestic violence and a school uniform exchange. These have become more prolific during the pandemic.
- **Activism groups.** Groups aiming to improve the area often focusing on green spaces e.g. an Urban Task Force or an In-Bloom group. Some are new, but others link into existing groups. One group knitted figures – angels during Christmas and Florence Nightingales during the pandemic - and distributed them locally to brighten up the area and improve community spirit.

It is difficult to untangle which groups emanated specifically from ABCD, partly because of the strong links to the Neighbourhood Organisations. Those included above appear likely to be attributable to the programme because of the timings and descriptions given.

Since the pandemic, how groups operate has changed. Many have been put 'on hold' as they can't meet physically. Others have adapted their activities by, for example, doing craft activities at home instead. In some areas, groups of residents have come together to help others e.g. providing furniture to a resident in need or setting up a uniform exchange for struggling families.

- **Group development and the role of the Community Builder**

This section describes how groups typically develop, with the assistance of a Community Builder. The beginning of a group's development starts with a 'germ' of an idea from a resident. They may already have this idea and need help **implementing** it, or the Community Builder helps them find **inspiration** through discussions about their skills and interests.

"We are not dictating 'let's set this up' it's come from them" (Community Builder Interview, Site 3)

The Community Builder supports the person by giving them **reassurance** and **confidence** in their idea.

"[person] turned round to me that day and he said, I've had this idea, I really want to cook for people in this building, but it's not community. I went erm, yeah it is. I was like come on, I was like there's 27 people that live in your building, I was like that's enough people to have a community, like that's your community." (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

The Community Builder helps the residents turn their idea into reality. This involves:

- linking them to other people with similar interests
- linking them to other groups that have complementary interests or resources (e.g. linking a newly formed arts group with an existing social club that is dwindling in numbers)
- connecting them into local assets (e.g. a place to meet)
- helping them with resources to get started e.g. Small Sparks funding for publicity material or set up costs.

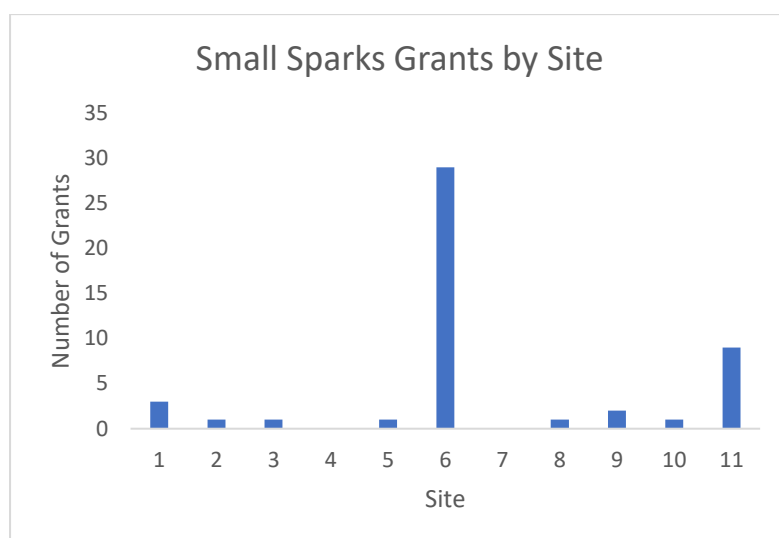
As groups continue in their development the Community Builders may help them with publicity, by liaising with external services or agencies (e.g. Leeds City Council Parks team), with technical expertise (e.g. how to set up a WhatsApp group) or with funding via the Small Sparks scheme.

Box 7 gives details of the numbers of 'Small Sparks' grants awarded.

Box 7: Small Sparks funding

Monitoring data shows that **48 Small Sparks grants** were awarded between Quarter 1 2019/20 and Quarter 2 of 2020/21 (an 18-month period), in 11 pathfinder sites. This is an average of **4.4** per site. This ranged from **0 to 29 grants per site**. One site awarded 29, another 9, the rest awarded 3 or less with most awarding 1 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of Small Sparks Grants awarded by site between Q1 2019/20 and Q2 2020/21.



The site that awarded the highest number of Small Sparks grants distributed them for activities such as: materials for a craft event, insurance policy for a community group, hall hire, and first aid training for volunteers. The site that awarded the second highest number held an event where residents could pitch ideas for community activities. This participatory budget event led to many new connections being made.

An important part of the Community Builder role is to help new or existing groups when they are **struggling**; membership may be dwindling, a key individual moving on or there might be a falling out between members. Having a Community Builder ‘on-hand’ to discuss these things with and provide potential ideas, is critical in stopping the group weakening or falling apart.

“An issue that can be faced, however, is local people having the resilience to “keep going” This is where the Community Builder role can help support the local person who is leading the group by maintaining the harmony and passion of the group and identifying those who need that little bit of extra encouragement and remain engaged with the activities and the friendships they have made.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

“you become that security blanket so that they can say, ‘actually I’m a bit unsure about that, I’m just going to give [the Community Builder] a ring’ and then knowing that I will always be there on the end of the phone. Cause I always say that to them ‘you are doing great, you don’t need me, but if you do, I’m here.’” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

Community Builders also help groups think about and plan for sustainability, for example providing support on alternative income sources.

As groups **mature** and become more capable the Community Builder's role will diminish – they talked about ensuring the group can cope without them and gradually detaching.

"We hope to steer away gradually from the crochet group as they become confident & independent to support and run the group." (Community Builder Interview, Site 3)

"...so that you can give them that bit of confidence and to give a push and say 'right from next month I'm not going to be here, you are doing it on your own, you don't need me.'" (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

Challenges relating to groups include members no longer being able to take-on the responsibility (for example, falling ill) or falling out with each. Lacking places to meet was an issue in some sites.

"So, the group was running really well, the people that used it, they were getting on great then something happened, and somebody fell out with so and so and.... Life happens (...) people had a fall out then it kind of dwindled down." (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

Whilst a pattern can be seen in how groups develop there is a **variation** in how much input they require. Some groups are very pro-active and rapidly take on responsibilities and training opportunities. Others require more intense support.

To summarise, asset mobilisation includes building relationships with individuals and organisations locally. This is done in an informal and flexible way, the most important aspect of which is getting 'out and about' in the area and building personal connections. Community Builders work with individuals, often supporting them first, then helping them develop their own skills and interests and to build connections with other people, services or groups. They provide practical help (connections, expertise, resources) and emotional support in terms of reassurance, energy and encouragement.

A wide range of groups were set up. The Community Builder helps residents turn their ideas into reality and assists the sustainability of existing groups with practical and emotional support. In a period of 18 months 310 new Community Connectors were identified and 48 Small Sparks grants awarded.

Structures

This section explores the structures that are needed for the pathfinder model to work. The Community Builders are central, supported in their role by Neighbourhood Organisations and a programme of training and support provided by Leeds City Council.

- **Community Builders**

Love of the neighbourhood and a **desire to change** it for the benefit of local people is a key motivation for becoming a Community Builder:

“The fact that I’m a resident and I love [neighbourhood] I love the place I live, and that if I can build on that in a work capacity, how fantastic.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

“I want to work and harness the good things about this community, inspire people, bring people together, connect people. How it was back in the day when we were growing up, I wanted to bring some of that love and connection back and that’s why it’s been really good”. (Community Builder Interview, Site 3)

Being perceived as ‘**local**’ or from the area was important. This is partly because a local Community Builder knows the area, but mainly because residents are more likely to trust somebody they know, leading to greater openness. Having trust in them is particularly important in “*beaten and battered*” communities as they can perceive outsiders as having their own agenda.

“It’s amazing how barriers are up until they realised that you are actually from the area”. (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

“You know what the beauty is, people know us. We are from this community, they know us. Some Community Builders are totally new to the area, they don’t live in the area, they don’t know the area. This is easy for us because we can build a rapport up straight away more or less.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 3)

Generating trusting relationships from ‘scratch’ can take a great deal of time – something the project did not necessarily have “*You’ve got to hit the ground running really.*” (Community Builder Interview, Site 3)

One stakeholder emphasised that Community Builders needed to be ‘relatable’ – this relates partly to personal skills (see below) but is also about being representative of the community. An example is where an area has many migrant groups – someone with a shared heritage or background may be able to build trust more easily. The issue of gender was also raised by one stakeholder who noted that only one Community Builder is a man. Why this is the case or the impact of this was not discussed.

“I think the best Community Builders are the ones that actually have some connection with the community, either they live there themselves or they live in a community nearby that’s comparable in some way, they need to be relatable.” (Stakeholder A)

For those Community Builders living in the area there is a **blurring of personal and professional lives**. This can increase motivation – as they want to improve their local area – but it also makes it difficult to switch off or “*walk away from the role*” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8).

“It [living in the area] does help, it does and it doesn’t erm, it helps that it is my area and I care about it and I work hard to change things, but then you got the time to yourself. You can’t go shopping without people stopping me. My daughter goes mental.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

Incorporating the role into an existing one was positive as it gave the Community Builder additional flexibility and access into more activities and resources. The relative ‘freedom’ of the role can clash with the culture of the Neighbourhood Organisation – this was the case in one site, as discussed later.

Key skills required of Community Builders include:

- being able to engage with a wide range of people, or being “relatable”
- good theoretical knowledge of ABCD

A **challenge** for Community Builders is resisting the tendency to be too activity-focused in terms of wanting to make things happen – they can feel under pressure to produce ‘outcomes’. Stakeholders said that Builders need to have the confidence to ‘step back’ and give the community the time and space to come forward. Part of the commissioning role, it was suggested, is to reassure the Builders that it takes time and not to expect instant results. Things happening too quickly could mean that the Builder / Neighbourhood Organisation are delivering activities they think the community wants and driving the work themselves, rather than genuinely working in an asset-based way. The example was given of one site where for a long time nothing happened but they “*held their nerve*” and then lots started to occur.

“That was really great learning for us as an organisation to hold your nerve because that building trust and building connections and listening to people, it all takes a lot time.”

Pressure on them to provide services can come from residents, particularly in high priority areas, where they may be more used to that style of working. One stakeholder suggested funding the role for a set amount of time with no expectations about outcomes.

Finally, Community Builders emphasised the joy of the role and how being able to see positive outcomes – for people and the area – is a highlight.

“Who gets to go out and listen to people then say ‘come on then, let’s do something about it’ it’s exciting, it’s fun!” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

- **Neighbourhood Organisations**

Community Builders are employed by local Neighbourhood Organisations. These operate for a variety of user groups including older people, those with learning disabilities or the whole neighbourhood.

The **selection process** was not formalised, though organisations were chosen for being community focused and separate from social care services (to avoid a tendency towards service driven ways of working), in certain locations or for working with certain communities.

The **benefits** of working within a Neighbourhood Organisation included line **management support** for the Community Builder and their expertise on the local area and the population. Several stakeholders felt it was desirable to place Community Builders in organisations which are already established in the area where staff and trustees are “*interwoven with the community*” (Stakeholder A). They can then confer the **trust** there is in that organisation to the Community Builder, thus helping them build relationships with people. Being in the third sector, and not within Leeds City Council, was advantageous as they have “*connections that no Local Authority could even get to.*” (Stakeholder E)

Most offer a physical ‘**base**’ for the Community Builder to be located in. This means they have an informal place where local people can ‘drop-in’, links can be made with other groups meeting there and the Asset Map can be displayed.

“Having a community café on site at the community centre is a real advantage to community building. It provides a focal point for informal conversations and a safe, welcoming environment for people to sit, relax and chat over a cuppa.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

Without a base there are practical difficulties, such as not having a venue for people to come and chat at unscheduled times. Adopting different ways of working (e.g. being in regular places in the community at a certain time and using a virtual map) can help overcome these difficulties but a more important issue is that without a base a Community Builder can feel disconnected and alone.

“It has been hard in lots of ways, and obviously not having a base there in some respects has been a little bit tricky again. It’s nice in some respects but not in others. So people don’t know where to go and find you. So you know if they’ve come up with something and they think I’ve got an idea or whatever, they can’t come and talk to you in person and not everybody wants to pick up the phone or send you an email.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

“I don’t exist in a building, I work from home, I’m in a community, and like some days I might not see people or be able to connect with them, or have somebody to bounce the idea off.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

It is advantageous if there is a good fit between the base and ABCD in terms of user group and geographic area. Without this, the Community Builder needs to work harder to convince people the

centre is for them. The base does not have to be related to the Neighbourhood Organisation - one Community Builder talked enthusiastically about a local community space being developed where they may be able to be located.

The **culture** and **ethos** of the Neighbourhood Organisation and how willing they are to embrace an ABCD way of working - and thus support the Community Builder in their role - emerged as a strong theme. Some organisations had fully embraced an ABCD approach and it was now woven into their organisation as a whole (see later). There was a feeling that some other Neighbourhood Organisations had not fully taken ABCD on-board. They may use the language of ABCD but still work in a service delivery way.

“When you drill down into the detail they’re doing loads of ‘to’ and ‘for’ and ‘by’, they’re not doing the ‘with’. They say they are doing the ‘with’ but they’re not.”

In one instance there had been a clash between the Community Builder and the Neighbourhood Organisation with clear differences in expectations regarding ways of working, including the level of formality of the role and what was delivered. This led to a breakdown in the relationship and the ABCD project ending at that site.

One risk relating to Neighbourhood Organisations is that they can act as a gatekeeper, disenfranchising the wider community and preventing them coming up with their own initiatives.

- **Training and Support**

The programme of training and support included an initial intense period of training offered by Nurture Development (with later ‘top-ups’), regular pathfinder meetings hosted by Touchstone, informal peer to peer support and individual support from the Leeds City Council ABCD team.

Feedback was very positive. The initial training increased Community Builders’ understanding of ABCD, helped change their mind-set and was inspirational for some.

“[The training] absolutely amazing that was good as well, and that kind of just gets your brain to think right I’ve got it now, I know what it’s about.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

The pathfinder meetings were a space to share ideas and learn from each other, as well as providing reassurance when things were not going so well.

“These meetings are really important because how else do we get to like bounce ideas off each other and stuff. I’m a big believer in plagiarism saves time, if one thing’s working in [area] why can’t it work here? Or can we tweak it and like take that idea further?” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

As mentioned in the next section, if Leeds City Council are present at the meetings there can be a tendency to focus on successes and positives with some Community Builders not wanting to admit to problems they may be facing.

During the pandemic these meetings switched to an on-line format providing much needed support during this difficult time.

“The meetings via zoom with the other Community Builders have been a good source of information but also of support. Some days when things haven’t been going so well it’s good to be able to express this with the group and listen to their views on the situation and their ideas of how to move forward.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

Allowing relationships to develop organically between Community Builders was positive as was personal contact with the Leeds City Council ABCD team.

“The telephone calls that I have received from both [Person 1] and [Person 2] have made me feel connected, being in contact with the Leeds City Council and the offers of support that both have offered have been a great source of comfort.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

There were varying viewpoints re the number of meetings. One felt there were too many, whilst others felt there were the right amount. It is possible that this depends partly on levels of confidence but also on stages of development. Finally, the importance of a package of training and support was emphasised – otherwise there was a danger of getting “burned out”.

To summarise, central to the pathfinder site model is a relatable, committed Community Builder supported by a comprehensive package of training and support (from peers, commissioners and other expert organisations). The role of the Neighbourhood Organisations is potentially more complex, as whilst they provide many benefits, challenges arise when their values do not align or if they can’t provide the facilities required for the Community Builder.

Challenges and Enablers

Table 3 lists key **challenges** to how ABCD works in the pathfinder sites in Leeds. Some are widespread, others are specific to a couple of areas – this is denoted where possible. Whilst some are surmountable with time and support, others are more difficult to overcome – especially those relating to mindset (from the community or the Neighbourhood Organisation) and those relating to the area or the community, such as anti-social behaviour or poverty.

Table 3: Key Barriers and Challenges within Pathfinder Sites

Barriers / Challenges	
The Area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of places to meet (widespread) • Patch too large – unsure where to start (specific) • Previous initiatives damaged trust (mainly struggling areas) 	The Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social / criminal behaviour (significant problem in specific areas) • Suspicion of the Community Builder, if new / outsider (specific) • ‘Possessive’ individuals – unwilling to work with Community Builder / overlap with other initiatives. Delicate relationship (long-term cohesive communities) • Expectations that the council / Community Builder will deliver services ‘not my problem’ (not widespread)
ABCD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dislike of jargon e.g. ‘Community Connector’ (widespread) 	Community Builder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lone working –no-one to share ideas with (fairly widespread), safety (specific) • Lack of base / place to be (specific) • Challenging role – ‘heavy going’ • Blurring of personal and work life (when Builder lives locally)
Working with individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult lives (poverty / illness etc) affects willingness / ability to engage. Focused on survival (struggling areas) • Lack of confidence, including apprehension re. joining in / trying something new • Dependency – needing a high level of support (if high level of needs) • Lacking capacity to act on ideas (those with learning disabilities) • Engagement ebbs and flows – previously keen individuals can drop out (widespread) 	Working with groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members falling out – just because they share an interest, doesn’t mean they share an approach / get on (widespread) • Bureaucracy e.g. opening bank account
Neighbourhood Organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture clash – different expectations of role (significant issue in specific sites) • Different population group – hard to reach new people because of preconceptions (specific) • Can disenfranchise the wider community 	Leeds City Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some services not responsive to community requests • Set parameters / expectations/safeguarding makes it harder to cede control to the community
COVID (all widespread and significant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents not able to meet face to face • Community Builder not able to be out and about • Preoccupation with the crisis 	

Many of the **enabling factors** are the converse of the above. Key factors include:

- Allowing time for ABCD to embed so that:
 - a trusting relationship can be built between the Community Builder and the community
 - residents and organisations can adjust to the new approach
- Working with Neighbourhood Organisations that have:
 - values aligning with the ABCD approach
 - an established relationship with the community in question
- The Community Builder being known and trusted locally– if this is not the case, allowing additional time for the relationship to develop
- Peer to peer and mentoring support for Community Builders, particularly new or less experienced individuals.
- Small sparks funding. Having an easily accessible fund allows groups to quickly make progress, thus maintaining momentum.

Box 8: Key ingredients of ABCD – learning & evaluation event 2

- Trust and communication
- Conversations on people's terms. Not starting with an agenda
- Having rapport and being authentic
- Needs time
- Working with what you have got in your community – grassroots level activity
- Local knowledge of the area and people
- Using bumping spaces
- Local organisations have a role but need to follow through to maintain trust.

Section 3c: Outcomes

This section reports on the three core programme outcomes (friendship, social connections, community action) and other additional outcomes that have been observed.

1. *People have good friends*

It is difficult to define 'good friends' and friendships take time to become established so it can be a challenging outcome to capture in the lifespan of an evaluation, but Community Builders identified 'ripples' of connections and the foundations of friendships being built. The starting point for friendships was people simply being open to others, groups being inclusive of different people, and residents having conversations with people they hadn't spoken to before. This often led to the exchange of contact details and individuals keeping in touch. There are also a number of examples of people reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances through ABCD, either by chance or by actively using community networks to reunite people.

The Foundations

- **Bringing together people with shared interests or challenges**

In the pathfinder sites, those involved in the project have seen that bringing people together with things in common, whether that be interests or circumstances, provides the basis for friendships to develop e.g. young dads, carers, people with a love of crochet or theatre.

ABCD created opportunities for people to bond over shared experiences, through activities, social groups and events. When bringing people together, it was important that the groups and spaces were inclusive, so everyone felt comfortable and open to getting to know one another:

"They were inclusive of anybody, I'm thinking of the young girl with autism, scooping somebody up who didn't have that opportunity and have taken her on board, and have been absolutely amazing with her." (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

- **Confidence to approach others**

Community Builders give people encouragement to make connections, almost a permission to approach others. In many cases, people want to say hello or make a nice gesture but are afraid of rejection or a negative response.

"One man said he often saw the same faces as he went to or returned from his work shifts. Although he recognised them, he did not know them. The Community Builder asked if he ever spoke to them and he said no, but they didn't speak either. Later in the conversation he made a decision to greet them as he passed and reported back that it had brought positive results –

smiles, nods, and a return 'hello'. He felt pleased with this outcome and was animated when he recounted it.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 5)

Everything starts with a conversation and relationships grow from there, bringing purpose and meaning:

“I know there are people who are talking to each other who weren't talking to each other before, I know there a group who was set up there are for people who have been out of work and now all of a sudden they are doing research for drama groups and what they can do and it's giving them a focus.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

- **Keeping in contact**

Being brought together leads on to the exchange of contact details and keeping in touch independently outside of organised activities:

“Through the second launch of the skills event that took place in October this has resulted in a few new ladies who did not know each other talking to one another and becoming friends and keeping in contact.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 2)

“The members of the amateur dramatics group have already started to socialise in the local pub after the rehearsals.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 8)

- **Building on initial connections**

There were many examples of friendships being developed and nurtured initially in the group environment and once confidence and familiarity grow, people arranged to meet outside of the confines of the group. People met for walks in the park, dog walking, social drinks etc. and the increased levels of confidence also meant they were more able to approach people in their day-to-day life resulting in further friendships.

“Monday Evening Social Club – [...] As with all our groups this one has been successful in connecting like-minded people and establishing friendships where people support each other outside of the project itself and they go on a monthly weekend trip together.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

Signs of friendships

There were many discussions with participants about how to recognise friendships are developing. People talked about good-natured ‘banter’ (jokey conversations), support through difficult situations, and increased confidence and independence as a result of quality social relationships.

- **Banter⁵**

People who were previously socially isolated and/or lonely came together and enjoyed good-natured jokes and laughs with others. This helped lift their spirits and build their confidence.

“Community Café really is a hub of activity and place where I have seen people connect the most. [Name] has made friends here and I feel like this has really helped him to build his confidence and he now has really good banter with the other volunteers. [Name] who runs the project says she couldn’t do without his help and the café has paid for him to do his food hygiene certificate so he can take on further responsibility.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

- **Mental health and independence**

Quality social interaction was seen to increase people’s independence as well as lifting their mood. In the process of the evaluation, researchers saw residents taking time to recognise people’s contributions, this gave others a boost, especially for those low in confidence. The social networks also contribute to problem solving and people feeling more able to cope with life’s ups and downs.

“[Name] here’s really put a lot into it you know but she’s very quiet and she don’t say much but we all appreciate everything that everybody does” (P3, Community Discussion Group, Site 4).

“[The] social group are becoming stronger and lot more independent, they are organising more trips out and those friendships are definitely blooming which is encouraging more people to become involved. The group is now growing in numbers which is really great to see.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

“They are supportive of each other and have formed new friendships. This signifies that having good relationships can help solve problems. New volunteers now feel they have a purpose, this also builds confidence and adds structure to their day.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

- **Community spirit**

Friendships and expanding social networks have increased the feeling of community spirit in general and several Community Builders have talked about groups ‘looking out for each other’ more, especially during the pandemic.

Whatever priorities the community set (e.g. health, environment, isolation) social connections are at the heart of it and residents recognise that relationships underpin everything.

⁵ Participants used the word ‘banter’ as a way of describing jokey good-natured conversations. We are aware it can have negative connotations but, in this context, it is meant positively.

“If we didn’t have the social element then nothing else would work would it so it’s the social element that starts it all off.” (P3, Community Group Discussion, Site 4)

Friendships in COVID-19

Community Builders reported friendships growing between volunteers who took on roles as telephone befrienders during the pandemic response and the people who they were matched with. There were many examples of the volunteers and those who received calls meeting up in person (at a safe distance) after the first lockdown ended.

The pandemic, in some cases, brought people closer together and cemented friendships as people supported each other through difficulties.

“Good friendships that last can take time to develop. Friendships can be fragile when new, but during the Coronavirus challenges, people from the [area] are looking out for each other and the bonds between people are growing stronger.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 1)

Relationships were further established through exchanging skills, particularly about how to use technology, and friends could stay in touch with smart phones and tablets.

ABCD helped to maintain social connections through offering activities online, providing encouragement, sending out activity packs to boost mental health and reduce boredom, and at one pathfinder site, setting up a community broadcasting service to keep people connected and informed.

To summarise, there is good evidence of increased friendships in pathfinder sites – and this is clearly valued by participants. Bringing people together with shared interests and helping individuals find the confidence to connect to others helped bring about this outcome. There are many examples of meaningful relationships being generated from ABCD.

Box 9 summarises a Community Builder interview with a Community Connector. It shows the critical role of the Community Builder in helping a group form, plus positive outcomes in terms of friendships gained and the confidence of the individual increasing. Pseudonyms are used.

Box 9: A Community Builder interview with a Community Connector (Self-evaluation pledge)

Jacqui had an idea for a group but didn't know where to start. When she saw a post from the Community Builder on Facebook, she thought she could be the right person to help so she got in touch. The group was for anyone interested in performance (singing, dancing, acting) with the aim of bringing people together to promote social interaction and creativity for adults. The Community Builder provided some motivation and practical support to get things moving. When asked if she would have started the group without the Community Builder's input, Jacqui replied:

"I think I would have kept saying to myself 'yes, I'm gonna do it, yes I'm gonna do it' but then I think I probably would have procrastinated for maybe another couple of years!"

There were 20 people in the first meeting and 15 regularly attended each week. The group members were all different ages and brought different skills and interests to the project, which was reflected in the roles they volunteered for e.g. secretary, social media, marketing, and behind the scenes work.

Unfortunately, just as the group was getting going and had lined up their first public performance, the pandemic hit. The main way they have kept in touch since the first lockdown is through the Facebook group where they can share ideas. The group leaders saw a lot of potential for the group and were confident that people will come back together with lots of new ideas when it is safe. Despite only having known each other for a few months, there were some clear benefits to the group leaders and the participants:

- **Friendships**

Spontaneously, during the interview between the Community Builder and Jacqui, Naomi joined in. Jacqui met Naomi through this project, and they found they worked well together and got on like a house on fire. On the day of the interview Naomi had gone to Jacqui's garden to sing together and make some plans for the group. Naomi was also on hand to offer technical support to Jacqui for the Zoom call with the Community Builder.

"I met Naomi through this [...] and we've got a good friendship going on now." [Jacqui]

They also talked about the other group members with affection and missed seeing them each week:

"It will be lovely to see everyone together again because it's been so long." [Naomi]

- **Confidence**

The group were half-way through preparing their performance for the VE celebrations, which included: singing, dancing, acting, and comedy, with associated costumes and props. The group's confidence had grown significantly because they were doing it well and enjoying it.

"In the beginning it's all about the confidence, I think, giving them the permission and freedom to be ridiculous; it doesn't matter, no judging!"

2. Individuals and communities are better connected

Individuals

- **Connecting to other people socially**

ABCD was found to help people discover their own talents and skills through connecting them with others, even if some people initially don't feel they have anything to offer. It provided the catalyst for connecting through projects, introductions and regular groups e.g. jigsaws clubs, crochet groups, social groups, coffee mornings. Residents recognise their increased links, and some feel respected for the roles they are playing:

"They tell me that they've made new connections, and new friendships, that they are recognised by others in the neighbourhood, and respected for what they are trying to do."
(Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 1)

Box 10 presents the numbers of new groups set up.

Box 10: Group Numbers

Monitoring data shows that **68 new self-sustaining groups** were set up in 11 pathfinder sites in the 18 months between Q1 2019/20 and Q2 2020/21.

This is an average of **6.2 per site** with a **range from 1 to 24** (see Figure 6 below).

The most common number of groups set up was 2 (4 sites). Six pathfinders had between 1 and 5 groups, four had between 6 and 10, whilst one (an embedded pathfinder set up in 2017) had 24.

Figure 5 shows the steady increase in the number of new groups.

Figure 5: Number of Groups by Quarter (Q1 2019/20 to Q2 2020/21)

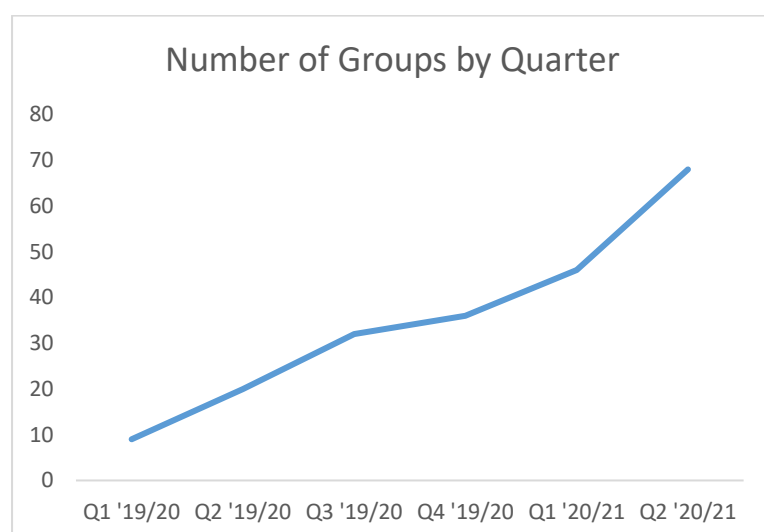
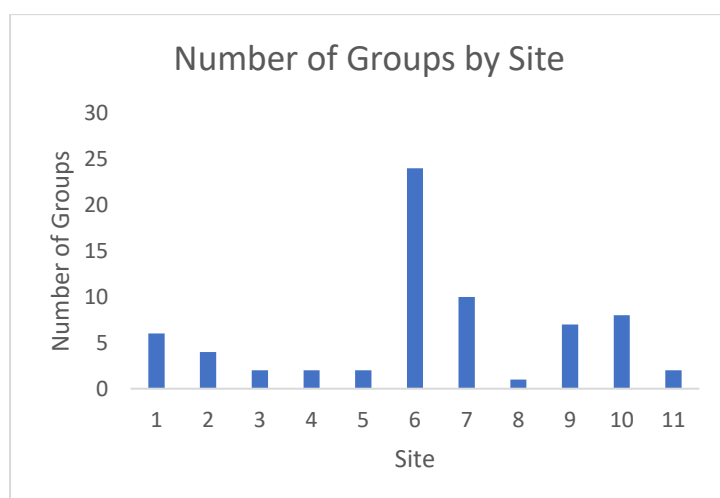


Figure 6: Number of new self-sustaining groups by pathfinder site (Q1 2019/20 to Q2 2020/21)



ABCD has encouraged residents to capitalise on existing social **spaces**, such as community rooms in blocks of flats; a collection of individuals, where often people did not know their neighbours, can become a community of people. Similarly, visible activities in public spaces (e.g. in the park, in the middle of the library) created a stimulus for starting conversations and involving people. Where the Community Builder was based in a community centre, this became a place that people gravitate to, even when there isn't an organised activity taking place.

"They started with the community room then they got other people down with bacon sandwiches and then we started doing arts and crafts [...], from there we did like little parties, Christmas parties, did a load of cards, hand-made cards at Christmas and you can imagine there's a load of people in a block of flats, and from there now coming on now they've done really well haven't they, [...] they're all friendly with each other and all the rest of it." (P3, Community Discussion Group, Site 4).

In some areas, creating pleasant spaces where people can connect has been an example of local people using their assets, for example, to make a community garden.

Being better connected has improved people's **mental health** and some residents described their widened social network as providing the **support** of a 'village'. There were examples of these networks coming together to solve problems for one of their members e.g. a uniform exchange project.

These connections and activities gave people the incentive to go out and do new things - it gave them something to look forward to:

"P2: Yeah I find myself looking forward to Monday mornings now."

P1: Yeah cos you think it sometimes gives you something to look forward to. You look outside at the weather and some days I think I'm glad I'm not going nowhere, do you know, but then again if I didn't get up and make myself go and do summat I'd be just stuck looking at my four walls." (Community Discussion Group, Site 2)

- **Introductions and skill sharing**

Qualitative analysis showed that for networks and community spirit to grow, bringing people together around shared interests and/or circumstances was important. Facilitating these natural connections leads to long-lasting relationships.

“When people can be organically brought together who have common interests, they create networks that are empathic and genuine, which in turn creates more sustainable community connectivity.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 5)

Box 11 estimates the numbers of group members in the pathfinder sites.

Box 11: Group Members

Numbers of members per group vary widely – from 2 people, up to 80 people. Given this range and the amount of incomplete data in the monitoring forms, we have used an estimated ‘typical’ number of members per group and then calculated a potential range of group members.

- Number of new groups is **68**
- A ‘typical’ number of members is between **10 and 15** per group (based on our knowledge of groups and conversations with Community Builders)

We therefore estimate between **680 and 1020 group members** in the 11 sites, in the eighteen months from Q1 2019/20.

- **Referrals/signposting**

Community Builders are well placed to know about suitable activities and support available because they have mapped the community’s assets. They often directed residents to activities, training, support, welfare, and services. These often took the form of social groups, creative or physical activities, and places providing material or emotional support e.g. Leeds Baby Bank, bereavement counselling, youth drugs worker, domestic abuse workers.

They also directed people to training and educational opportunities e.g. ESOL classes, and ABCD training to further enhance understanding of the project.

“Another lady [name] who has been struggling to find a job and has had a difficult few years trying to bring up a family and other personal issues in their life has been supported through the ABCD project to connect to a training provider ‘Step into Care’ and go through their assessment process successfully and is now going onto their training and hopefully able to get a job after the course as a care worker.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 2)

“The groups [...] have been doing some ABCD training at [name] Community Centre, having the opportunity to come together and network has enabled them to identify that there are common interests between the two groups and have been talking about setting up a community choir.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 4)

Community Builders often linked people up to appropriate statutory services e.g. directing them to support with benefits (e.g. child benefit, unemployment), housing, health issues.

- **Building bridges and promoting intergenerational connections**

Some ABCD activities have brought together individuals that have had tensions in the past and they have had chance to get to know each other and potentially overcome their differences. There have been a few examples of this happening with teenagers/young people whose behaviour has been challenging but, when brought together in positive circumstances, different age groups have got on.

“I was doing hand and arms massage and a load of kids came up, didn’t they, about twelve or thirteen boys and they were a bit boisterous at first and were watching what I was doing and I could see everybody looking over at me and I just turned round and I says “You’ll relax if I do a hand and arm massage,”. And by the time I’d finished I think there were about five of them I got them all doing hand and arm massaging and then afterwards they were calm, relaxed and you could see the real them then.” (P3, Community Discussion Group, Site 4).

Groups such as a Jigsaw Club or a gardening club have provided a space for connections to form across different age groups.

- **Sense of belonging**

Supportive, inclusive environments have meant that people who previously found it difficult to be involved in community activities were able to join in e.g. people with learning disabilities or other impairments.

“The connector for the games group is overcoming his anxieties by leading the group and talking to members of the public (connector has Autism, ADHD and physical disabilities).” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 8)

In some areas ABCD has started to become embedded into community life. Local businesses have adopted the principles and this, along with the sense of belonging fostered, can lead to the connected becoming Connectors:

“Following previous conversations, one trader in particular is making extra time to talk with some of his customers who are more isolated and struggling with mental health.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 5)

“The sort of ripple effect taking his confidence, newfound confidence into speaking to people, his neighbours and connecting with them and then when he connects with them that are further connections beyond that and it really is wonderful to see.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

“People are more aware of what is available in their neighbourhood and beyond, more people are accessing groups and activities. There is a sense of belonging.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

- **Organisations**

The pathfinder sites reported partnerships with GP surgeries, local businesses, schools, Leeds City Council and NHS services, as well as other third sector organisations. ABCD has helped to identify, develop and drive many local partnerships that are now in place and continue to flourish. Community Builders have an important role in facilitating partnerships and maximising collaboration potential:

“The Community Builder role has helped partners to better understand what each partner brings to the table and this has helped find common grounds and identify where we can work together to help local people as opposed to working in silo.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9).

As the project has gained a wider profile there have also been connections with organisations across the UK and overseas. Some sites have received visitors from other regions of the UK and abroad to learn about how asset-based working can potentially improve community health and wellbeing.

COVID-19

Connections made between people and organisations were particularly apparent during the pandemic. In one site, a partnership with district nurses helped to coordinate support for the community and in others the new surge in volunteers coming forward revealed a range of valuable assets, from qualified counsellors to technical knowhow.

Some pathfinder sites loaned devices to residents and supported them to use them to maintain connections, and gain IT skills in the process. Many groups that could no longer meet in person moved online and for those facing digital exclusion, group members phoned each other to check in.

In a lot of the areas, Community Builders observed the pandemic bringing communities together and it is hoped those connections will endure:

“[Area] is definitely a stronger community as a result of this crisis.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 6)

“ABCD in action has seen people come together to support each other, whether that is doing each other’s shopping, walking dogs or organising weekly street bingo. I like to think that the slower pace of life and spending so much more time in our community has helped to forge some lasting community bonds.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 10)

Sites also had a key role in keeping people connected to local and national guidelines by sharing LLC information. Connections were fostered through sharing healthy recipes; and crochet patterns and delivered face masks to people in the area.

The box and figures below are provided by a Community Builder as a self-evaluation pledge.

Box 12: Connectivity Mapping Observations

Following a self-evaluation workshop, one Community Builder produced a map of connections (Figure 7) between residents, recording the themes linking people as well as gender and age (Figure 8).

"The diagram shows the significant connections and conversations over a 4-week period. It only includes people met and talked with previous to this time and those who have been communicated with at least 10 times.

Significant connections often link people of the same gender and those of similar ages.

Health issues and helping a neighbour significantly connect people across age and gender"

(Community Builder, Site 5)

Figure 7: Connectivity Map

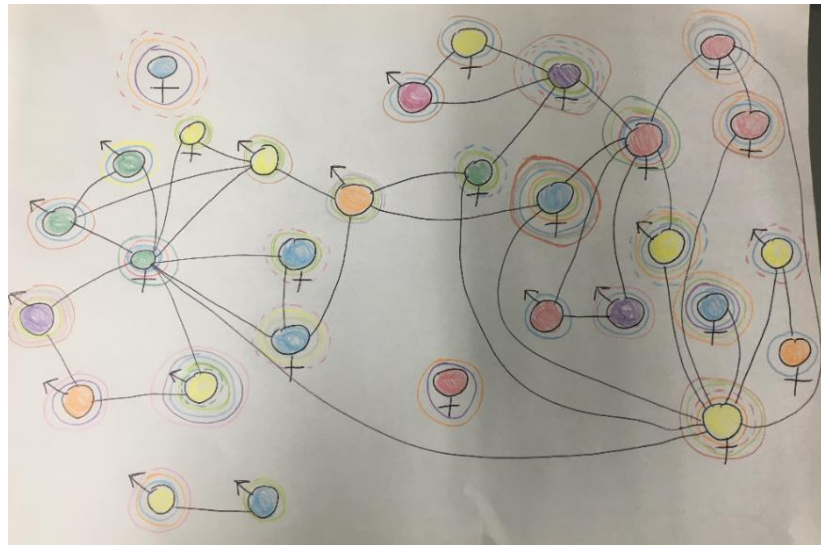
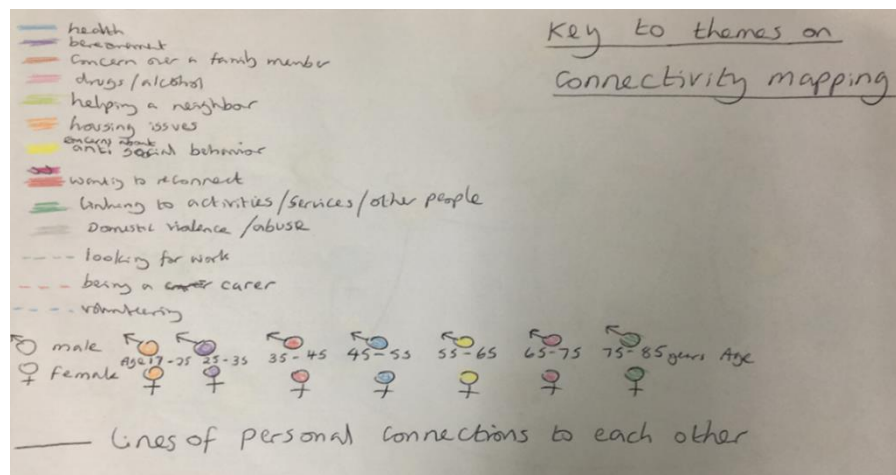


Figure 8: Key to themes on connectivity map

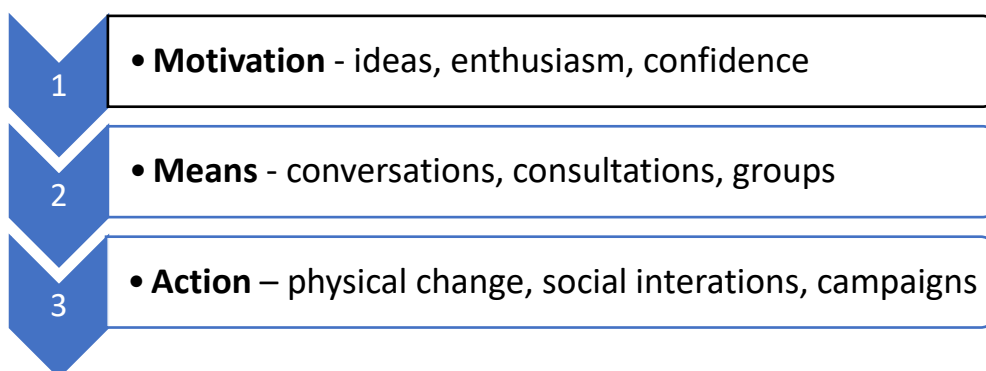


To summarise, ABCD connected individuals via their interests and community activities. 68 new self-sustaining groups were set up in eighteen months with an estimated number of members between 680 and 1020. Builders signposted residents to services and organisations for support and assistance. At times these connections helped reduce tensions between residents and increased the sense of belonging to the area. Partnerships between organisations were also encouraged.

3. Communities identify and work together to bring about the changes they want to see

In the same way that ‘good friends’ are not created in an instant, communities do not go from zero to bringing about changes overnight, but the qualitative data shows that the process can be broken down into different phases.

Figure 9: Phases in communities undertaking action



Phase 1 – Motivation

Individuals and communities need the motivation to work towards change; they need ideas and enthusiasm.

Skilled Community Builders had numerous conversations with residents about what is important to them. This generated a huge volume of ideas including using community rooms in blocks of flats, providing activities for young people, transforming a community space, reducing food waste and coming together to cook.

As a way of encouraging residents to think about what changes they would like to see, some sites offered suggestions:

“The formation of a choir was one of the suggestions ‘put out’ to the community as ideas for community connections on the mailout postcard.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 6)

The Community Builders provided encouragement, advice and an initial invitation to be involved:

“I do think there are lots of things that are already there, I think to the people who have been involved with, it's been really interesting to see what their thoughts are, and how they want things to happen within, but of their interests, maybe not ‘just a pointer’ having somebody else that can believe in them.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

Phase 2 – Means

The next stage involved giving people the opportunity to share ideas and make plans to create changes. This was done in a range of ways, for example, establishing groups, steering committees or consultations where the Community Builder often acted as a facilitator.

“Two ladies from [Area] Community Group are participating in steering group meetings for the new local community centre, with a view to being part of the partnerships that will run the centre when it opens.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 1)

Community Builders have connected people to formal consultations about parks, roads, and housing developments, and they hope that residents will be encouraged to be more active in the community when they see their input has shaped council decisions about local changes. In one community discussion group a member concluded: *“it’s really good isn’t it, the council are now more trusting with us”* (P1, Community Group Discussion, Site 4).

“Change is brought about through conversations and consultations. It is about making people see that what they think is impossible because they don’t feel like they have a voice or will be listened to is actually possible.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

The Community Builders can act as representatives at meetings concerning community spaces:

“I have continued to attend the monthly [Area] Town Council meetings to keep up with what is happening locally and to get an update on [building name], which they are in the process of buying for community use.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 10)

Existing groups can also be catalysts for change with additional support from ABCD, this is an important part of mobilising the assets already present in the community:

“Having overcome some initial scepticism, the club members are absolutely leading on improvements and will need very little input moving forward. They just needed a little bit of energy to kick-start things again.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 5)

Phase 3 – Action

With the ideas, contributors and processes in place, new and existing groups and individual residents have brought about change. Physical changes in the area have taken place with some communities coming together to improve community centres and public spaces. In addition, there have been changes with a social impact such as monthly group meals or action through campaigns and petitions e.g. for a broadcasting license.

“A petition was signed so that East Leeds FM could get a broadcasting licence and they now have an FM channel which is keeping local residents connected and informed of what’s going on locally during the crisis, they give daily updates on what’s going on in the supermarkets and lots of other useful information.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 4)

ABCD has brought together different groups to work towards common goals:

“Over the past three months club members linking up with local residents, [Area] in Bloom, Friends of [Name] Park and [arts group] have: cleared the sloping wall to make way for the mural [...] Repaired the roof; Repaired damage to wall and ceiling from leaks; Repainted the large bar room...” (Quarterly Monitoring Report , Site 5)

Community Builders have seen a positive feedback loop when people begin to take action and make changes, positivity increases and leads to new ideas being generated and enthusiasm for doing more:

“The idea for the [name] Garden Club was all about promoting local leadership and ownership for outdoors spaces as far as practicable. For instance, two community members now have their own key for the 'Potting Shed' which is being set up for practical tasks and also links to an evolving conversation about a Maker Project/Repair Cafe/Men in Sheds type set up.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 6)

Improved **community morale** was observed in some pathfinder sites. Participants described how a number of small changes taking place (e.g. a new group or an improved patch of greenery) can lead to an overall increase in positivity in the neighbourhood; changes may be small but the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

“Everybody’s getting happier actually. I mean you’re walking round and you see them all and they’re like hello, hello so they’re getting to know you more.” (P3, Community Discussion Group, Site 4)

“I have noticed that the recent work to restore the patio area has seemed to invoke a sense of optimism in people visiting the [community centre] in general and helps to create a positive atmosphere.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 6)

4. Other Outcomes

Change in mindset of residents

The move to ABCD required a change in mindset of residents, many of whom have been used to receiving services and therefore needed to adapt to playing a more active role. In some areas, this is still an ongoing challenge, but others have seen residents starting to change how they think and take ownership of projects and spaces:

“They don't think about you know, what can somebody give me to make this happen? it's actually, let's have a look around and see what we can do to make this happen. Rather than waiting for some sort of organisation to come in to do too them, they are looking to help each other.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 8)

Change in mindset of workers

It is not only the residents who had to learn to move away from a service delivery model, workers also had to learn to work differently and for some this led to an improvement in work-life balance, in

addition to the benefits it brings to the community as a whole. This is because in the past, workers often tried to deliver everything themselves leading to 'burnout' or having to prioritise some projects over others, which in turn affected relations with residents who at times felt let down.

"When you are trying to do everything yourself, you get burned out or things get dropped or things, you'll start something off and cause you are doing something else for somebody else, things get lost and they get lost and they don't happen and then people get fed up." (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

The shift in emphasis of ownership to the community freed the Community Builder up to use their time and skills to best effect and, by supporting others to run their own groups and projects, much more could happen in the area.

"This is going to be your project and we are going to support you to run it' and that's how actually it's changed the way I work. Which has massively made a massive input to my life, 'cause I was working at home, I was working on weekends, I was trying to catch up so I was never not working." (Community Builder Interview, Site 4)

Influence on the host and other organisations

Community Builders act as **ABCD champions** spreading the word in their area. This can influence their own employers and other organisations to implement ABCD more widely; seeing it in practice can help others understand what it involves and the potential benefits. Some Community Builders have also described how they incorporated ABCD into other unpaid roles they had in the community.

"[Area] Live at Home are aware of ABCD principles and are trying to implement them within their organisation." (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 10)

Improved health and wellbeing of residents

There have been reported improvements in the health and wellbeing for many residents as a result of increased confidence and social interaction, volunteering, signposting, referrals and access to services.

There are many examples of people starting to feel valued and then wanting to give something back; the people receiving support initially can then volunteer and take part in initiatives that connect others.

"I met him at the food bank, as we do with a lot of people, we suggest they go to the community cafe, 2 weeks later he was a volunteer and he still a volunteer there, and you speak to him about it now he says it's the highlight of his week. [...] If you speak to the ladies who do the cooking in the kitchen they will tell you he has grown in confidence so much and has a really nice banter with people, the other volunteers and things, whereas when he first started he was quite meek I guess and quite shy." (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

ABCD also offered ways of keeping people mentally active if they were retired or not working:

“So anything like this really it does help just to get you out and get your brain going again, that sort of thing.” (P2, Community Discussion Group, Site 2)

Community Builders have heard accounts from some residents that they used health services less as a result of being more connected in the community:

“He’s a lot happier, he doesn’t see his psychiatrist, doesn’t see his doctor, so that bottom-up approach, if he had come to the community in the first place, he could have cut out the other issues [...] He’s a part of society, he is a part of the community. That’s not what he was feeling at the time.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

Increased confidence and feeling valued

Residents grew in confidence with support from the Community Builders and became more involved, taking on more responsibility. Feeling appreciated by other people and having their skills recognised also boosted their self-esteem and gave them purpose.

“We listen, build relationships and people become more open to ‘new opportunities’ growing from strength to strength in many cases. With increased confidence people become better at working out solutions to problems and issues they may have.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 9)

“When we’ve been on a trip it’s [...] just nice for people to say “Thank you, I’ve really enjoyed it.” It makes so, it just makes everything worthwhile and like it just gets me out of bed on a morning to come here.” (P5, Community Discussion Group, Site 4).

“So now he’s needed, you know, we need him, it’s built his confidence. When he first came in he wouldn’t talk to anybody, he’d sit the furthest away from the next person, now he has made friends.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9)

Opportunities for training and paid employment

ABCD provided opportunities for volunteering, training and work and there were a number of examples demonstrating a pathway from participant to volunteer or group lead and/or to paid work.

“...a number of ladies who have attended the group have now decided they would like to run their own craft group to be able to sell some of the work they have created they have met with [name] from Trust Leeds who is now supporting them to set up their own self-reliant group.” (Quarterly Monitoring Report, Site 4)

In some cases, residents could sell things they had made, others took on paid employment at the Neighbourhood Organisation, and others went on to work elsewhere after building up skills and confidence through being involved with ABCD.

“So, I’m employed now [...] That’s just in eighteen months yeah. Yeah not quite eighteen months. I literally just came downstairs and said to [Name] “I bake cakes, I wouldn’t mind volunteering.” (P4, Community Discussion Group, Site 4)

Box 13: Key outcomes for communities – points from learning & evaluation event 1

- ✓ Increased friendships and stronger social connections
- ✓ Neighbourliness – lots of volunteers stepping up
- ✓ Local groups forming and blooming – generating new social activities
- ✓ Community Builders connecting with people who they were not in touch with before
- ✓ Natural progression as groups grew. Outcomes for residents included increased self-worth, a sense of belonging and reduced social isolation
- ✓ Sharing of skills and talents
- ✓ Impact on young people and coming together – mixing of generations
- ✓ Children doing things for their community e.g. a litter picking group
- ✓ Street-level connections in lockdown e.g. 'adopt my street'
- ✓ Increasing digital skills within community building
- ✓ Bringing together partnerships with other organisations.
- ✓ The pandemic has 'slowed pace of life' and people are connecting better with the people around them

To summarise, other outcomes emerging from the data include a change to an asset-based mindset for residents, workers and organisations. Individual outcomes include improved health and wellbeing and confidence, increased opportunities and feeling valued. How many people were affected is not possible to ascertain.

Section 4: Programme Level Findings

This section presents findings at a programme or strategic level, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders. This includes perspectives on ABCD, its ‘fit’ with the work and ethos of Leeds City Council plus commissioning and monitoring. The section goes on to look at how ABCD has spread beyond the pathfinder sites before moving onto potential future opportunities for the approach in Leeds.

Stakeholder Perspectives of ABCD

Strongly **positive opinions** of the ABCD approach emerged. Putting **power** in the hands of people and communities was one reason for this. Giving people more control over their lives and allowing them to offer something (reciprocity) was felt to increase self-worth.

“It’s how we value people’s gifts and recognise what they can do and support them to use their gifts. We’ve all got something to offer, how can we make sure everyone has opportunities to contribute?” (Stakeholder G)

At a community level it was felt there was great potential that could be embraced – one participant described how the pandemic had brought to the fore the existence of *“massive untapped civil society”*.

“The power of helping knit people together is quite incredible.” (Stakeholder G)

Underscoring this is a **belief** in people’s abilities both individually and as a collective. One participant said they had always had *“huge faith in the power of communities to do what’s right for themselves.”* (Stakeholder B)

The ABCD focus on **strengths** was universally welcomed, particularly when working with struggling communities.

“the focus on strengths which is really powerful for communities that are often labelled as being problematic. (...) If we spend less time focusing on what is wrong with communities, there will be more impact and free up capacity to invest in communities” (Stakeholder A)

Being **citizen-led**, allowing communities to identify what they wanted to focus on, was praised.

“[ABCD is] starting work with what matters to people. We need other things as well but it is a key enabler to change for people owning their own futures.” (Stakeholder I)

Being **inclusive** and not ‘othering’ or labelling people was also seen as important. ABCD is a less hierarchical way of working with communities. Having friends locally and a supportive neighbourhood was described by one participant as being far more satisfactory and less patronising than being befriended via an official scheme.

These key aspects of ABCD were contrasted with a **deficit-based approach** that was felt to reduce self-worth, disempower people and communities thus creating dependency and cynicism.

“People over the years have seen different organisations parachute in for 3 years, tell people what they need, what will improve their lives and when the funding is finished, they’ve gone. And I think people are sick of that.” (Stakeholder H)

“[In a previous role we] were held back by the really rigid deficit approach and instead they were singling out people based on their needs which was disempowering and led to a self-fulfilling prophecy when young people were told they were from the poor areas, leading to more anti-social behaviour.” (Stakeholder I)

At a pragmatic level, ABCD **frees up resources** and **increases capacity** – thus being good value for money. Previously, organisations were doing things for people that they could do themselves e.g. running lunch clubs / arranging transport. Allowing communities to do things for themselves reduces bureaucracy and increases the quantity and quality of activities offered. One participant described how since embracing ABCD they had 10 groups, of varying sizes, operating for just over £1000 – this was a far better use of resources than a service led model.

“one of the main things is we too readily employ people to do things for people when they’re more than capable of doing things themselves, and doing it better” (Stakeholder H)

There were **caveats** to this strong support for the approach. One is a need to recognise that ABCD cannot replace services (though one stakeholder felt that long-term it will reduce demand for them) or tackle structural inequalities. Some people and some circumstances still require input, the strength of ABCD is that it can free up resources to be focused where most needed.

“ABCD never said you don’t need services but what it says is first and foremost start with your community and your neighbours, then look at what you can do via the social sector and only then look at what you need a formal service to do”. (Stakeholder C)

“ABCD isn’t a replacement for decent benefits and support. At the same time, you can’t assume people in poor areas are not capable of incredible things.” (Stakeholder G)

ABCD is therefore seen as **both ethical and pragmatic** and, as such, ideal for the current times. For one stakeholder its appeal is that it offers a practical way of working, a method of improving connections.

“ABCD gives you a framework for supporting community, citizen-led action. And that action is focused on connections and connections being good for your health and wellbeing and other things, and that’s what I liked about it.” (Stakeholder C)

Leeds City Council Ethos

ABCD was thought to fit well, in general, with the Leeds City Council ethos in that there was both an **“asset-based mentality”** and a strong history of working with **third sector organisations**. There was also an enthusiasm for working in a **‘place-based’** way. The re-shaping of social care was felt to fit well with an ABCD type approach.

The need to re-think and reorientate the **role** of the council emerged as an important theme. In the context of discussing ABCD, stakeholders spoke about the need to move away from service delivery, as this is no longer a viable option. It needed to be acknowledged that the council, as an individual entity, cannot do everything on its own. Focusing on desired outcomes, considering how these can be achieved and who can contribute was felt to be a positive way forward. This was a *“subtle but important shift”* (Stakeholder C). Whilst there was strong support for this shift in emphasis, there was some reported resistance to change, with some individuals or areas within the council still having a desire to deliver services and not appreciating the importance of building trust in the community.

“Some of the limitations are people’s mindsets, especially where there is a legacy of municipal paternalism and people expect services and they expect there to be a role of the state but ABCD takes a step back from that.” (Stakeholder B)

Related to the above is the need for the council to **‘step back’** from certain aspects of people’s lives, allowing them to make their own decisions.

“The state can’t and shouldn’t monitor and invigilate neighbourliness, that’s not our business.” (Stakeholder B)

Challenges associated with this ‘stepping back’ include **accountability and safeguarding**. Opinion among stakeholders was divided with some continuing to be guided by Leeds City Council’s policies and procedures regarding issues such as health and safety, whilst acknowledging that this does not fit well with a completely ABCD approach:

“I would err on the side of caution here because I think if you don’t then it ends up potentially people being hurt, good work being damaged in terms of reputation and organisations as well having difficult things to work through.” (Stakeholder I)

Others were keen to trust residents’ abilities to make their own decisions and manage risk as they do in daily life. It was not necessarily appropriate or realistic for the council to screen all those involved in ABCD as they are not formal volunteers; *“they’re just people doing things.”* (Stakeholder C).

A balance between what citizens transact between themselves and what the council facilitates needs to be reached. One example of a compromise is when a council department funded a community

meal. Health and safety concerns led to residents taking a course on food hygiene – this was beneficial for them in terms of increasing their skills whilst also helping to keep people safe.

The **local focus** of ABCD was felt to be an advantage, as it tends to get buy-in from ward-based councillors. A challenge however is that many of the positive outcomes from ABCD e.g. a resident led walking group are not ‘badged’ as council services. This lack of clear attribution and intangibility means councillors are less able to demonstrate achievements to their electorate.

Enabling factors for ABCD becoming accepted by Leeds City Council include:

- Buy in from Leadership – key senior members and political leaders have promoted a culture of innovation and systems change – this and their belief in ABCD has given the team permission to try new approaches.
- Bravery – it takes courage to look at innovative preventative programmes and not just increase thresholds whilst continuing as before
- The programme lead having the status to implement change both in terms of seniority and being trusted by the wider council
- Structure *“I think it flourishes best where there is a framework and an architecture for it rather than random stuff, if you are going to be comprehensive in a whole council approach.”* (Stakeholder B)

Commissioning

Despite undoubted support for the ABCD approach from Leeds City Council, the commissioning and funding structure is a ‘top-down’ one. This places Leeds City Council in a position of power and can be at odds with some of the key values of ABCD. Some of the processes around commissioning, such as objectives and monitoring requirements, can make it more difficult to allow communities to take control.

Selecting organisations to work with is challenging. Neighbourhood Organisations, some of which may be struggling to survive, may seek to attain funding without necessarily sharing a strong commitment to the approach. This can be hard to assess reliably when choosing which organisations to work with. In addition, one stakeholder suggested that larger and more successful third sector organisations are more able to attract funding as they have the infrastructure, capacity and the language to apply, thus excluding more ‘grassroots’ organisations.

Commissioned organisations continuing to work in a ‘business as usual’ way was identified by some stakeholders as an issue. Despite having power Leeds City Council were not always able to influence how organisations were run.

“If you’ve got somebody who is either resistant to the approach or doesn’t like the person who’s doing it, us as a funding organisation, we can’t interfere in how they run their organisation, that’s not down to us.” (Stakeholder J)

Some stakeholders stressed that it can take time for organisations to shift their approach as they have been working in a traditional way for decades. Rather than expecting change to happen straight away, it should be viewed as a series of steps.

“[It is] a journey rather than an end destination and actually there are a million small micro-steps you can take on that journey.” (Stakeholder A)

“it will “take time to unlearn how things have worked for decades, it’s not easy.” (Stakeholder I)

A vital component to starting this journey is being willing to reflect on their role in the community. The Community Builder can also at times change opinions and practice but, if the organisation is not receptive, this can be challenging for them.

The imbalance of power in the relationship can lead to organisations and Community Builders being reluctant to share challenges they are facing with Leeds City Council. One stakeholder suggested that some pathfinder meetings should be kept separate from Leeds City Council as this will encourage more open conversations.

It was also suggested that Leeds City Council need to be explicit about their expectations in advance of commissioning. This could include, for example, asking for a commitment from management to reflect on the role of ABCD or a pledge to incorporate ABCD as part of their culture.

Monitoring / Evidence

The ABCD team at Leeds City Council need to provide evidence of ‘value’ and this can be at odds with their desire to not stifle Community Builders in their role. The Community Builders interviewed tended to accept a need for monitoring via the quarterly reports, one or two talking with pride about the diligence of their records.

Various ways of capturing evidence were discussed:

- Retaining the existing quarterly forms but supplementing with conversations and / or visits. It is the latter aspect that provided the depth of information.
- Stories, possibly visual ones as these have the power to change minds.
- An SROI type approach - numbers are seen to appeal to decision makers in the council.

- The importance of measuring the right things was also discussed e.g. how much time is the Community Builder spending 'out and about' or how many conversations are they having.

To summarise, there is strong support for ABCD in Leeds City Council and it is a good fit in many ways with the council's ethos. Key challenges include how best to manage the relationship with Neighbourhood Organisations and how to balance the ethos of ABCD with the commissioning process and the need for monitoring and accountability.

ABCD Spreading Beyond the pathfinder sties

Committed, vocal advocates for ABCD within Leeds City Council have made it part of their mission to communicate ABCD and its potential to other directorates in the council and other organisations in the city.

"In 2019/20, the team spoke with 236 individuals / organisations and provided briefings and presentations on asset-based principles to a range of services." (Leeds City Council Executive Board report, 2019:7).

They have worked on how to communicate so ABCD feels less of a threat and more of an opportunity. One factor that has supported the uptake in other services is that the language of strengths-based approaches is already written into their priorities, underlining the overall direction of Leeds City Council.

Figure 10: Asset-based working in Leeds

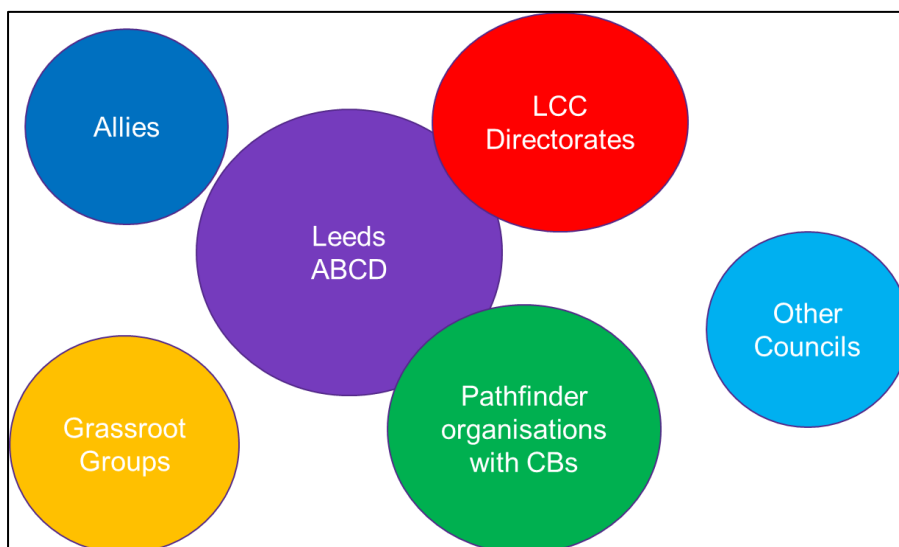


Figure 10 gives an indication of where asset-based working has been observed in Leeds. Some directly emanates from within the council (e.g. the pathfinder organisations and other services), whilst some is related (e.g. allies who work in partnership with the council). One stakeholder emphasised that some grassroots groups have been using asset-based approaches independently for some time.

External groups were originally involved in the ABCD pathfinder meetings, but this was changed to just being for the pathfinder sites. One stakeholder believed that some groups felt excluded and this could potentially trigger resentment.

The **Leeds City Council ABCD programme** established by the Adults and Health directorate was the focus of this evaluation, but an asset-based approach has also rippled out to other services in the council, most notably in Sport and Leisure, and Housing. Other departments were also already incorporating some of the principles, but using different terminology, for example, restorative practice in children's services.

Some stakeholders reported that other departments have been more resistant to changing the way they work. There can be a culture clash with existing practice, and for change to happen there needs to be an openness to the 'messiness' and an understanding that ABCD takes time.

In **Sport and Leisure**, staff understand that people are motivated to become more active through connections, and a programme of classes does not meet everyone's needs. They worked with people to find out what they wanted, and in some cases, this led to surprising outcomes e.g. establishing a pole dancing class. The work is not pure ABCD because there is a clear remit of increasing physical activity, but the decisions were made by the community not the council as to what was best for them and the residents have ownership of their classes:

"They are now independent groups. People involved now probably don't know about the role of the council." (Stakeholder C)

The **Housing service** is well placed to benefit from an ABCD type approach as they have direct contact with tenants. They recognise however, that it would be difficult to incorporate strengths-based conversations into some roles, particularly those with enforcement responsibilities. The tenant engagement team has a focus on building relationships and is therefore a natural fit for ABCD. The management felt that they were already working in an inclusive and coproduced way 'with' communities but hadn't gone as far as 'by', so the next stage of working is a shift to the solutions coming from the tenants as opposed to the housing team offering a *"palette of ideas"* (Stakeholder D). They offer £450k of funding for residents to make changes in their community and have reduced

the bureaucracy and conditions attached to the funding considerably to make it more accessible to everyone.

There is interest and support from allies in **other Leeds based organisations**, especially those related to health, who are seeing the value of ABCD in their work. ABCD as a way of addressing health and social inequalities has been included in Systems Leadership training in Leeds which has been delivered to 700-800 people from the third sector, NHS, the council, community groups, faith communities, and patient volunteers.

Other Local Authorities (LAs) are keen to learn from Leeds City Council and stakeholders expressed interest in building regional networks to support sharing of good practice. When promoting the approach to other LAs, one stakeholder offered the advice of ‘embracing the uncertainty’ as this is quite a departure from how councils have historically worked. Sharing successes is important for raising the profile of the work, but stakeholders stressed the importance of also sharing the failures so others can learn and understand that the approach requires trial and error; not everything will work and that is part of the process.

“It will take time and it will feel uncomfortable at times but sit with that. [...] It’s messy so accept that mess.” (Stakeholder G).

In some areas, the **Neighbourhood Organisations** involved in the pathfinder work have begun to **embed ABCD** in their wider work. There is evidence of a culture change taking place.

“We can really embed the principles and the outcomes of ABCD in our work going forward. My instructions to the support workers [...] is that we apply the ABCD model to everything that we do.” (Stakeholder K)

Community Builders shared examples of incorporating ABCD into **other roles** they have in the community, both paid and voluntary. They also act as ABCD champions advocating for its use in other organisations.

“I’m probably there as a resident, but using the ABCD approach, so we are going from the bottom up and we are going to be using volunteers and local citizens, and we are going to be having consultations.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 9).

“Generally, people like what they hear and it makes sense to them. I think if I keep banging the drum, we will see people start to adopt the principles, or refine the way they currently work within the principles, for their organisations.” (Community Builder Interview, Site 10)

The ABCD training has been offered at no cost to anyone interested in registering and there are anecdotal accounts of participants pledging to move away from the deficit model used in their work.

The future

The backdrop to this evaluation is of intense financial pressure, heightened by the high cost of the pandemic response.

“The impact of Covid on the budget has been catastrophic.” (Stakeholder B).

Partly in response to this, it is seen as necessary to *“fundamentally rethink what a council offer is like”* (Stakeholder B) putting citizens at the heart of that offer going forwards:

“[ABCD] is a way of redefining the relationship between an organisation (in this case the council but it could also apply to the NHS) and citizens.” (Stakeholder C)

As was seen earlier, the Leeds **pathfinder model** has widespread support and there was a desire to expand the model out to all areas of the city; *“If I was the council, I would just do it in every area.”* (Stakeholder H). Care needs to be taken to not ‘scale-up’ too much as this can detract from its grassroots nature and *“lose its essence.”* (Stakeholder A).

Another stakeholder talked about *“holding your nerve”* and investing in ABCD as a way of saving money. However, it was recognised by many that, in the current financial circumstances, this is now *“phenomenally difficult”* or indeed no longer possible.

One stakeholder felt this was now a time for reflection – whilst existing pathfinder sites would continue, other ways of taking forward the ABCD approach within the city needed to be considered.

Incorporating ABCD approaches into existing roles was suggested as one possible way forward. This would require identifying where work is already being done in an asset-based way. Roles such as PCSOs, anti-social behaviour officers, practice nurses in LPC networks, and library staff were suggested. The potential for tension, between existing roles and an ABCD approach, was raised with some jobs being more compatible than others. For example, positions with enforcement duties cannot take on Community Builder roles.

Basing Community Builder roles **within existing structures** could also be considered. Stakeholders proposed Local Care Partnerships, neighbourhood networks, libraries, social prescribing programmes and tenants and residents’ associations.

Libraries, as an example, have a good fit with ABCD as they are at the centre of communities, providing a neutral, welcoming space for people to come together. As a service, it was felt that they could not operate in a pure ABCD way and library staff would potentially be more suited to acting as Community Connectors as opposed to Builders.

“We can’t be true ABCD because at the end of the day, we are a service.” (Stakeholder F)

Elements of the Community Builder role, where they connect people to services and activities, were felt to resemble social prescribing. Leeds CCG has invested £1m in social prescribing so it would be useful to consider how this could be delivered in an asset-based way.

There are around 70 tenants and residents’ associations in Leeds (although they vary greatly in numbers and frequency of meetings) and a pilot project is exploring how they could be enhanced by adopting more ABCD approaches.

To summarise, whilst there is strong support to roll the pathfinder model out across Leeds, financial constraints mean this is unlikely to happen in the short-term. Alternative strategies are being reflected upon, each with their own strengths and limitations. Incorporating asset-based working into other services and organisations is seen as one way forward but, if they are also delivering services it cannot be entirely citizen-led.

Box 14: Spreading, scaling and sharing ABCD practice – learning & evaluation event 2**Scale:**

- ABCD needs to use natural neighbourhoods – ‘trust can’t be built with thousands of people’.
- Scale is a problematic concept for growing ABCD. Scaling might be seen as ‘convenient’ for the council as linked to the austerity agenda.
- ABCD develops differently in different neighbourhoods depending on available assets, size and social context. Community centres and buildings can be useful but are not essential as informal bumping spaces can be used.
- ABCD is about working with ideas raised by residents - growing change naturally. Some examples of social entrepreneurship – e.g. a crochet group growing to a craft market.
- Supporting newly constituted community groups to fundraise therefore reducing dependency.

Sharing and communicating:

- The importance of communication and sharing what’s going on – people then see things can happen.
- Capturing information differently – using pictures and stories, maps and memory boards.
- Need to communicate messages about ABCD - videos and magazine articles can be used.
- Language and jargon can be a significant barrier. Terms like ‘assets’ or ‘Community Connector’ – it’s not how people talk. There was a reminder that empowerment is also a problematic term as empowerment can’t be ‘given to people’.

Spreading ABCD in the city:

- Sharing across the pathfinder sites is critical – spreading the word helps it grow organically.
- Networking with Community Builders can help share experiences although not everyone uses these meetings.
- Work is spreading across Leeds City Council and other groups and services. Culture change is needed.
- Send messages to other community-based organisations – VCS organisations and groups and also NHS organisations and health practitioners.
- The learning & evaluation events and other workshops with the research team helped people share what they had learnt and achieved.

Section 5: Social Return on Investment pilot study

Introduction

This is a pilot study of the feasibility of doing a social return on investment (SROI) analysis for two Leeds pathfinder sites. It provides an indication of what the potential SROI could be across all the pathfinder sites, as well as exploring the feasibility of doing a full SROI analysis for future research, in which it would be deeply embedded in the evaluation from the outset.

The New Economics Foundation⁶ describes the principles of Social Return on Investment as follows:

“Social Return on Investment (SROI) is an outcomes-based measurement tool that helps organisations to understand and quantify the social, environmental and economic value they are creating. Developed from traditional cost-benefit analysis and social accounting, SROI is a participative approach that is able to capture in monetised form the value of a wide range of outcomes, whether these already have a financial value or not. An SROI analysis produces a narrative of how an organisation creates and destroys value in the course of making change in the world, and a ratio that states how much social value (in £) is created for every £1 of investment.”

Box 15: The six principles of SROI

1. Establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders. Clear boundaries about what the SROI will cover, and who will be involved are determined in this first step.
2. Mapping outcomes. Through engaging with stakeholders, an impact map, or Theory of Change, which shows the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes is developed.
3. Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value. This step first involves finding data to show whether outcomes have happened. Then outcomes are monetised – this means putting a financial value on the outcomes, including those that don’t have a price attached to them.
4. Establishing impact. Having collected evidence on outcomes and monetised them, those aspects of change that would not have happened anyway (deadweight) or are not as a result of other factors (attribution) are isolated.
5. Calculating the SROI. This step involves adding up all the benefits, subtracting any negatives and comparing them to the investment.
6. Reporting, using and embedding. Easily forgotten, this vital last step involves sharing findings and recommendations with stakeholders, and embedding good outcomes processes within your organisation.

⁶ <https://www.nefconsulting.com/our-services/evaluation-impact-assessment/prove-and-improve-toolkits/sroi/>

Steps 1 (identifying stakeholders) and 2 (mapping outcomes and Theory of Change) are covered in the context of the wider evaluation (see Sections 2 & 7). The second part of step 1 and part of step 6 (boundaries about what the SROI itself will cover and who will be involved) was further discussed and developed as part of this pilot process, both in learning events and in sense-checking conversations with the two sites. This report section covers steps 3-5, and part of step 6.

Methods

Two sites were chosen for this pilot study. One (LS14 in Seacroft) was an ‘embedded’ site, set up in 2017, with a longstanding community hub, networks and infrastructure. The other (hft in Horsforth), was an emerging site, set up in 2019. This latter site is less established with no physical hub and an additional remit to work with people with learning disabilities. These sites were chosen because it was felt they would give an indication of the full range of SROI values that could be returned across the whole of Leeds ABCD pathfinder sites.

Given that outcomes and outputs are expected to develop in the medium to long term from ABCD programmes, the findings for LS14 give an illustration of what type of SROI value might be expected from an established ABCD project. A summary of the results from the more recently established hft are also reported. Full workings are given in Table 5 in Appendix 9.

We attempted to calculate:

- (i) The SROI for the ABCD activity undertaken by the LS14 centre, and the Horsforth pathfinder, and the communities they serve;
- (ii) The social value that can be attributed to outcomes experienced by three individuals as case studies – indicating the potential benefit and social value for transformative cases.

To do this, we used the following outcomes from the evaluation:

- i) Outputs (benefits) used for LS14 and Horsforth:
 - Number of Community Connectors (from the last quarterly monitoring data report before the March 2020 lockdown)
 - Number of people who say they have made a new friend (from the last quarterly monitoring data report before the March 2020 lockdown)
 - Decisions made to change something in an area e.g. changes to a park, social activities, micro-economic business (from monitoring data and qualitative data, across the project lifetime)

- ii) Outputs (benefits) used for two case studies in LS14 and one in Horsforth:
 - Key outcomes as above (made a new friend; decisions made to change something)
 - Any other outcomes reported in the qualitative interviews

Valuation

Financial proxies for social values were found using the global value exchange tool <http://www.globalvalueexchange.org>

The values we have used are listed below, together with any assumptions made.

Volunteer time: We took the number of volunteers (Community Connectors) from the latest quarterly monitoring report before the March 2020 lockdown from both sites and made the assumption that on average each person contributes a minimum of 2 hours per week. This is a conservative estimate. We calculated what this represents in terms of paid work using the national minimum wage.

Volunteer social value: We took a financial value for wellbeing benefits of volunteering, based on an existing report, from the Global Value Exchange. As explained later, there were other values for volunteering but we have not put them all into this analysis as this is a pilot study. We did feel this was the most relevant value, but in the full report we will use other values in a sensitivity analysis.

Made a new friend: We took the numbers from the social groups listed and mentioned in interviews by the Community Builder and others. We have used a financial value taken from a paper on the Global Value Exchange on the monetary value of life satisfaction gained by increased contact with friends, family and neighbours. As above, we could have used other values, but felt this one was most relevant.

Decisions made to change something: We have used a financial value from the Global Value Exchange on the social value of increased sense of autonomy and control. As above, there were other values reported in other studies, which would be applied in a sensitivity analysis in the full SROI.

Adjustments

- **Duration and drop-off:** Before the calculation can be finalised, a decision has to be made as to how long the changes produced will last. Some outcomes may last longer than others and may also be dependent on whether the activity is continuing or not. We think that benefits related to friendships and wellbeing are likely to continue if the activity continues. Outcomes which may continue to have a value in future years cannot be expected to maintain the same

level of value, so we assume that the value will reduce or “drop off” each year. It is difficult to find statistics on volunteer retention rate, but evidence from two studies suggests that can be around 80% (at 6-12 months from recruitment (Hall et al., 2016, Pahl et al., 2010). However, discussions with the Community Builders have favoured a more conservative estimate of 50% drop-off, not so much because volunteer numbers fall away, but because they ebb and flow depending on external circumstances – they have increased greatly during the pandemic for example.

- **Deadweight:** A reduction for deadweight reflects the fact that a proportion of an outcome might have happened without any intervention. The craft café SROI evaluation made an adjustment for deadweight of 17%, therefore a similar adjustment is made in the social value here (Social Value Lab 2011).
- **Attribution:** Attribution takes account of external factors, or the contribution of others, that may have played a part in the changes that are identified. Attribution is difficult to calculate, but as a conservative estimate, 50% of the benefits could be attributed to the projects.
- **Displacement:** Displacement applies when one outcome is achieved, but at the expense of another, or another stakeholder is adversely affected. In relation to this project, obvious sources of displacement could have arisen as a result of staff or volunteers being diverted from other interventions. However, it is difficult to calculate the effect of this.
- **Sensitivity analysis:** A sensitivity analysis was conducted which took into account attribution, deadweight, displacement and the effect of using higher and lower social values for the outcomes recorded.

Sense checking process

The draft SROI was presented to stakeholders at an early stage for discussion of the process and values used (see Box 16). The draft SROI report was then shared with Community Builders and staff at both sites, and separate conversations were had to determine whether the numbers and values used, and adjustments made, felt like a fair representation of the process and outcomes in practice. This aligns with step 6 in the SROI process.

Results

I. SROI for pathfinder sites

a) LS14

With all the adjustments in place, in this pilot study, the **estimate of SROI for the LS14 pathfinder** is within the range of **£5.27 and £14.02** of social value returned for every £1 invested.⁷

b) hft

With all the adjustments in place, in this pilot study, the **estimate of SROI for the less established Horsforth (hft) pathfinder** is within the range of **£0.59 and £2.74** of social value returned for every £1 invested. These results may reflect that the hft project needs time to develop, become established and produce outcomes that fully reflect its potential social value.

The results of sections i are presented as the range of possible SROI values, from lowest to highest values given by the sensitivity analysis. The main reason for the relatively large range in the SROIs is that there is a wide variation in the social values that can be ascribed to the outcome of 'making a new friend.' At the higher end, a study suggests a social value equivalent to £15,500 per person per year while at the lower end the suggested social value is equivalent to £770. This range of values is plausible as for some people in certain circumstances the value of a new friend could be life changing, whereas for others the impact is smaller. It is likely that the true SROI values lie in between these two extremes. For more details of how these were calculated, see Appendix 9.

II. Social value: case studies

The case studies below give an idea of the potential social value for individuals. The literature at present places a much greater social value on meaningful friendships than more casual social connections, and on self-employment than part time employment. There could be some overlap of outcomes, for example the higher value for self-employment may include increased confidence and control, so these latter outcomes may not need to be given a value in our analysis.

⁷ This value range is different from the early findings presented at the Leeds City Council Executive Board meeting in September 2020, as the sense checking process (step 6) took place after that meeting.

Case Study 1 (LS14):

Avril was referred to the centre from the GP. She went to an art therapy class and that had a huge positive effect on her mental health and whole life. She continued with arts and crafts and has set up her own business. She has done courses on massage and healing and uses those to connect with people in the community. She now feels a part of the community and has seen the difference in others who come to LS14 with no friends or interests, and then grow in confidence as they find their space and what makes them happy. The centre has boosted her confidence greatly and she recognises that the social aspect is the foundation for all the other outcomes. She is now very active in outreach to identify people's assets and help them to make changes to improve their community. She has built deep friendships and feels really connected in the community.

Social value:

Employment (self)	£11,537.48 (HACT ⁸ wellbeing value, from GVE)
Confidence	£215 (SROI network, from GVE)
Sense of control & autonomy	£1,400 (as in Table 5, Appendix 9)
Friendship	£15,500 (as in Table 5, Appendix 9)
Sense of belonging	£1,850 (member of social group, from GVE)
TOTAL:	£30,502.48

Case Study 2 (LS14):

Helen hadn't worked for a number of years while her children were young and initially offered to volunteer at the centre. After initially volunteering in the café, she is now employed at the centre and runs several groups. It has increased her confidence, given her purpose and cemented her connections in the community.

Social value:

Employment (part time)	£1,176.32 (HACT wellbeing value, from GVE)
Sense of control & autonomy	£1,400 (as in Table 5, Appendix 9)
Confidence	£215 (SROI network, from GVE)
Sense of purpose	£2,563.60 (from Craft Café SROI evaluation) ⁹
Sense of belonging	£1,850 (member of social group, from GVE)
Social connections	as above (not duplicated)
TOTAL:	£7,204.92

⁸ Housing Associations' Charitable Trust <https://www.hact.org.uk/about-us>

⁹ Equivalent of a meaningful job working 5 hours per week

Case Study 3 (hft):

Martin lives in a small block of flats and doesn't know many people in the area. Since meeting the Community Builder at the foodbank, he began volunteering at the community cafe. He has set up a residents' group and applied for small grant funding to support meetings, and has begun volunteering at another project. Through volunteering and social events with other residents, his confidence has increased, and he knows a lot more people through the café, where he lives and at church and other projects.

Social value:

Wellbeing benefits of volunteering	£13,500 (as in table 5, Appendix 9)
Confidence	£215 (SROI network, from GVE)
Sense of belonging	£1,850 (member of social group, from GVE)
TOTAL:	£15,565

Box 16: Feedback from learning and evaluation event 2

Results from the LS14 pilot Social Return on Investment (SROI), together with an explanation of how social value was calculated, were presented to participants at the second learning & evaluation event. This related to one of the core questions for the event: 'How can you best capture positive changes to demonstrate it works?'.

The SROI results were broadly welcomed and there was interest in this method being used for other pathfinder sites. Participants raised questions about

- how the value of ABCD is pulled apart from several different streams of work in a community
- the source of the social value figures for friendship
- where the values came from and relatively small financial value given to increased confidence compared to other values
- who identified outcomes - project workers or those gaining friendship?

To summarise, a pilot SROI study was conducted on two pathfinder sites, at differing stages of development. The estimated SROI value for the more established site is within the range of £5.27 - £14.02 for every £1 invested. A social value was also calculated for three individuals, with estimated results varying from between £7,025 to £30,502 per individual.

Section 6: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

From March 2020 onwards, the COVID-19 pandemic, as a global emergency, has had significant impacts on individuals, communities and organisations in Leeds. There has been a huge response from local public services, VCS organisations and communities to support people in need. Dealing with the pandemic impacted on how the ABCD programme and pathfinder sites worked. It also affected the evaluation and what was possible. This section captures some of those impacts, drawing on the interviews, research team reflections, and the learning & evaluation workshops.

Impact on Leeds ABCD programme and pathfinders

The ABCD pathfinders contributed to the pandemic response in the city, working within neighbourhoods and with community groups and volunteers. The information reported below does not cover everything that was going on at community-level, particularly as a number of pathfinders were the COVID-19 response hub in their area.

One strong theme was that the crisis stimulated community action and mutual aid. While there was a large coordinated response from Leeds City Council to ensure people could access essential items and support, Community Builders also reported seeing people coming together more spontaneously to help each other out; for example, with dog walking or remote social activities. Exchanging skills helped people build relationships e.g. tech skills. Overall, bonds between people appeared to be getting stronger during this period and were cemented in the crisis.

“This crisis has acted as a catalyst for the community to come together.”

“People [...] are looking out for each other and the bonds between people are growing stronger.”

Community Builders reoriented their role and activities in response to the lockdown and community needs. This included coordinating emergency support and ensuring essentials were delivered to people. This was described as a “lifeline” and included visits, calls, meals, shopping and delivery of food parcels.

Organised befriending took place during this difficult time. Community Builders reported keeping social aspects going through the pandemic, adapting communication methods and going online. They also kept in contact with those who were digitally excluded through visits where possible, letters, and phone calls. Examples included:

- Using Zoom for existing social groups
- Members of groups organising phone calls to each other
- Socially distant meets, although some people did not want to engage
- Craft projects to spread positive messages – in food parcels, around the neighbourhood
- Using a local broadcasting service – and radios for residents.

Although naturally, Community Builders were well placed to be part of the emergency response, some were unable to continue working in the community (due to regulations from their employers). They used their time to develop their asset map further, build on social media presence and find creative ways to engage residents e.g. films, newsletters, poetry. The prior connections and assets that the Community Builders had identified provided a strong foundation for responding to the crisis; however, there was some concern that while this community response was necessary, it was not asset-based.

“I think the hardest thing about the challenges we have faced over the last 10-12 weeks is that although we have tapped into a lot of assets in our community it is not always done in an ABCD way, but I still think it will lead to good things in the future.”

There was further reflection on impact of the pandemic on communities and ABCD practice in the learning & evaluation events in November 2020. See Box 17.

Box 17: Impact of the pandemic – key points from learning & evaluation event 2

- The year has been a struggle - ‘how can you be a Community Builder from your kitchen?’
- People have lost confidence and Community Builders are sometimes having to ‘look after people’.
- Huge impact on social groups. Some activity has moved to online platforms, like Zoom, but everyone prefers face-to-face.
- The pandemic has stopped even green spaces and public spaces being used.
- Some communities have come together to help each other – in streets or through small community mutual aid groups.
- The COVID-19 community response is a good news story of what communities can do.
- Despite the difficulties and hardship, there are examples of communities coming together and forming stronger bonds in lockdown. The pandemic will leave a positive legacy of better social connections.

Impact on the ABCD evaluation

The ABCD evaluation was designed as a collaborative evaluation based on extensive community-based fieldwork. The pandemic came at the end of year 1 of the evaluation and had a major impact on priorities and what data collection was possible. The most significant impact was that the ABCD programme as an intervention changed at a critical point in its development. As described above, Neighbourhood Organisations refocused on the pandemic response and normal activities were

effectively suspended. We were therefore evaluating something different to what was planned, although many of the core principles of asset-based working were adapted to this new situation.

The pandemic had a major impact on how the research team worked. All face-to-face data collection was suspended, which was contrary to the naturalistic methodology planned (see section 2). Two community walks with Builders did not take place and this loses some of the context. Only two out of six of the community discussion groups took place. It was much harder to build a rapport between the university team and Community Builders without in-person meetings and to reach residents via phone or video call for interview. Only four residents/Connectors were interviewed in this period. The areas were selected because of the level of deprivation, so many people are digitally excluded and this created a barrier to recruitment. Compared to researchers 'cold-calling' on the phone, a face-to-face group at a familiar location with people who residents know and trust (plus the promise of tea and cake) is much more attractive. In contrast, organisational stakeholders were generally keen to take part in phone interviews.

We were mindful that the capacity of those involved in the evaluation (researchers, participants and Leeds City Council staff) was reduced, due to the lockdown and ongoing pandemic response. Some Community Builders were furloughed during this time. Although all evaluation workshops had taken place, potentially fewer self-evaluation pledges were returned than would have been – researchers did chase up Community Builders for these but in a 'light touch' way making clear they understood the pressures they were under at the time.

Any group activity had to be redesigned. This particularly affected the learning & evaluation events. The original plan had been for a relaxed day with an emphasis on hearing everyone's voice. We had to change on an online format over two 1.5-hour sessions, which limited interactive discussions. Despite the constraints, we received good feedback on the events.

To summarise, the arrival of the pandemic substantially impacted this evaluation. It affected the ABCD programme in general as pathfinder sites and communities re-orientated. It also affected the ability of the research team to reach and build a bond with Connectors and residents who were due to participate in the Spring/Summer of 2020.

Section 7: Evidence synthesis & Theory of Change

This section brings together the different elements of the evaluation to make an overall assessment of Leeds ABCD programme. We consider evidence in relation to the evaluation objectives to:

- articulate the Leeds ABCD model, what it is and how it works, in a simple Theory of Change based on stakeholder perspectives and linked to the evidence base on community wellbeing.
- gather and analyse data from the pathfinder sites on processes and impacts at individual, community and organisational levels.

Further discussion of learning and emerging issues around measurement and practice are covered in the next section. A full report on the wider evidence base for ABCD accompanies this report.

How we developed the Theory of Change

Qualitative and quantitative findings, including the SROI results and themes from the learning & evaluation events, were mapped against the initial Theory of Change (developed in 2018 by Leeds City Council) (Appendix 1). The original underlying mechanisms were refined based on our analysis. The primary outcomes remain the same, but with the addition of some unanticipated (Other) outcomes.

The Theory of Change is presented in Table 4. A Theory of Change aims to show how interventions work in specific contexts. It involves mapping the causal chain from what people do (Activities/Inputs) and where (Context), the underlying mechanisms or change processes (Mechanisms) and then how these link to the expected and unexpected outcomes (Outcomes) and the overall Goals. This is shown for Leeds ABCD in a simplified form in Figure 11. Table 4 brings it all together by summarising the evaluation findings and assessing the strength of the evidence. Although this is shown as a linear process, in fact it is more like a series of cycles that build towards outcomes.

Most of the evidence has come from qualitative data. The interview data and the monitoring reports contained very rich accounts of how ABCD developed and what outcomes occurred. Results were sense checked at the learning & evaluation events, alongside further discussion of asset mapping, Community Connectors and community-level change. Robust methods of qualitative analysis were used to identify themes and synthesise data. There was limited quantitative analysis, with the exception of the SROI. Overall, there is triangulation of findings across data sources and across multiple sites, which all adds to the strength of evidence. One strong theme is that ABCD is not a standardised model and develops in different ways in different communities. The summary pathfinder

profiles in section 3a illustrate some of the specific journeys. This section provides an overview of findings across the programme.

We used the grading terms adopted by the What Works Wellbeing Centre for their evidence briefings to explain the relative strength of what was found (Box 18)¹⁰.

Box 18: How strong is the evidence? [Adapted from What Works Wellbeing (Snape et al., 2019)]

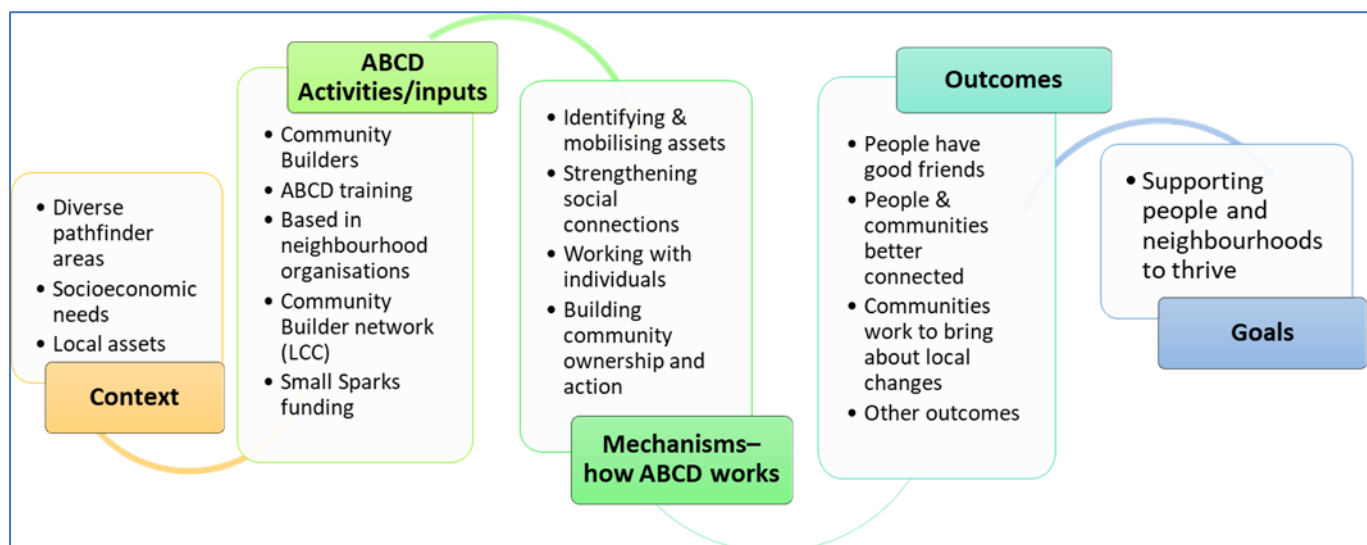
STRONG – we can be confident that the evidence can be used to inform decisions.

PROMISING - we have moderate confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

INITIAL - we have low confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions.

Evidence can be **QUANTITATIVE** or **QUALITATIVE**

Figure 11: Leeds ABCD – a theory of change (based on evaluation findings)



¹⁰ <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/>

Table 4: Leeds ABCD Pathfinders – evidence synthesis mapped to the Theory of Change (TOC)

TOC	Summary of evaluation evidence	Evidence sources <i>STRENGTH of evidence</i>
Context	Diverse pathfinder areas, range from ‘thriving’ to ‘struggling’ - socioeconomic factors, community infrastructure and community cohesion vary. Some communities face stigma and don’t want to be labelled as deprived as not whole picture. Starting point for ABCD can be communities dealing with hardship, fear, lack of trust, loss of infrastructure.	Interviews & monitoring reports (qualitative) <i>PROMISING - on range of challenges but few community perspectives</i>
ABCD Activities/ inputs	Community Builders recruited & receive ABCD training. Hosted/linked to community-based/Neighbourhood Organisations Community Builder network coordinated by Leeds City Council Small Sparks funding available Community Builder - key roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in and with the community • Asset mapping • Identifying and enabling Community Connectors • Working with individuals who need more support • Signposting to services and other groups • Supporting new and existing groups • Reporting & gathering evidence 	Programme documentation & monitoring reports Interviews (qualitative) Learning & evaluation events Monitoring reports (Qualitative & quantitative) <i>STRONG - triangulated from different sources</i>
Underpinning mechanisms ‘How ABCD works’	I. Identifying & mobilising assets (using ABCD model) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Shared understanding of ABCD model – Bottom up approach – but some communities need more active support initially. – Asset mapping useful process but questions on how to involve communities and best format for map. – Tangible and intangible assets are seen as interdependent. – Community Builder a key role. Tension between enabling and supporting. 	Interviews (qualitative) Learning & evaluation events Monitoring reports (qualitative & quantitative)

TOC	Summary of evaluation evidence	Evidence sources <i>STRENGTH of evidence</i>
<p>Underpinning mechanisms</p> <p>‘How ABCD works’</p>	<p>II. Strengthening social connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Getting out into the community and having conversations. – Using media, bumping spaces, networks and local organisations. – Identifying Community Connectors as people who want to help/join in. – 310 new Connectors in 18 months. Numbers of Connectors vary between sites (6-110) – Neighbourhood Organisations can offer a base <p>III. Working with individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Asset-based work with individuals – Start with skills offered, encourage connections, enable people to go on a personal journey to increase connections and social activities. – COVID-19 pandemic meant Community Builders needed to shift to helping some individuals. <p>IV. Building community ownership and action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Growing community activities based on what communities want to do – Focus on strengthening existing groups and starting new ones – Community Builder has key role as link person; can be a catalyst, provide practical help, link people up and sometimes ongoing <p>How ABCD works in diverse areas with different communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not a linear model, but a series of cycles of listening, connecting, building and ultimately achieving sustainable, inclusive community activity. – Not every person, organisation nor group follows this cycle – some support is needed in different contexts. – Mechanisms lead to outcomes at different points for people and communities 	<p><i>STRONG evidence that ABCD works in different communities/contexts- triangulated from different sources.</i></p> <p><i>STRONG evidence on strengthening local groups and new community activities; triangulation of qualitative data supplemented by quantitative data; consistent themes across areas.</i></p> <p><i>PROMISING evidence on Community Connectors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Numbers vary but who counts as a CC not clear? Labelling may be an issue •Gathering Connector views impacted by the pandemic <p>Interviews & learning events Site profiles – data summary</p>

TOC	Summary of evaluation evidence	Evidence sources <i>STRENGTH of evidence</i>
		<i>STRONG qualitative evidence; common themes across varied community contexts</i>
Outcomes	4 major outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ People have good friends ✓ Individuals and communities are better connected ✓ Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see ✓ Other outcomes (unanticipated) 	Interviews (qualitative) Learning & evaluation events Monitoring reports (qual & quant) Self-evaluation – evidence from projects
Outcomes	People have good friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More opportunities for people to join in and connect with others. Starts with conversations. – Confidence, independence, and wellbeing grow. – New friendships built in groups where supportive relationships form. Some friendships carry on outside of formal structures. – Pandemic has brought some people closer together. 	PROMISING - Friendships. <i>Challenging to measure but outcome consistently valued. Strong qual evidence of individual cases across sites; plausible causal chain from foundations to meaningful relationships. Not clear how many impacted.</i>
	Individuals and communities are better connected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social connections being formed through groups, social activities and use of spaces to meet people e.g. parks, library. – Numbers of new groups linked to ABCD; 68 new groups in 18m. – Facilitating connections leads naturally to stronger community networks. – Some examples of greater community cohesion; bridging differences in generations and being more inclusive of people with disabilities. – Social connections fostered in the pandemic. More neighbourliness. – People signposted to other support, services, and local activities. – Connections with local organisations and wider afield. 	STRONG - Social connections. <i>Mostly qual with consistent themes triangulated across data sources. Corroborated by quant on group numbers, which show increase in social activity.</i> PROMISING - Pilot SROI <i>shows social value of ABCD through increasing friendships and volunteering.</i>

TOC	Summary of evaluation evidence	Evidence sources <i>STRENGTH of evidence</i>
	<p>Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pathway starts with increased motivation demonstrated by new ideas, confidence and enthusiasm. – Examples of sharing ideas and planning together. Many means of involvement: informal conversations to establishing new groups and taking part in consultations and steering groups. – Some examples of positive community action bringing about changes in area. – 48 Small Sparks grants awarded 	<p>STRONG –Pathways to change. Good qual evidence on typical pathway to community change; clear links between early asset-based conversations with later community action.</p> <p>PROMISING – Community change. Promising evidence on changes in communities. Some examples given but no sense of impact.</p>
	<p>Other outcomes (unanticipated)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Changes in mind set of residents – Improved health & wellbeing of individuals due to increased social interaction. – Increased confidence and feeling valued. – Increased support for ABCD in organisations; changing mindset of workers. – Opportunities for training and employment – Increased morale in community. 	<p>PROMISING –other outcomes. Not the focus of the evaluation but many other individual and organisational outcomes reported.</p>
<p>Achieving sustainability</p> <p>LT Goals – thriving neighbourhoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term growth of community action/social connections in pathfinder sites • Sharing & learning between pathfinders and across the city and beyond • Leadership support for ABCD • Incorporating asset-based working in other services; rippling out • Citizen-led approach balanced with council responsibilities 	<p>Stakeholder Interviews (qualitative) Learning & evaluation events</p> <p>INITIAL – Sustainability. Evidence relatively early in programme development; however, stakeholders positive about sharing model</p>

Section 8: Learning from the evaluation

Leeds City Council has taken a pioneering approach to developing asset-based working. This section discusses the evaluation findings and considers ‘what has been learnt from implementing ABCD?’ It builds on the previous chapter which summarised the evidence by mapping findings against a Theory of Change and the three core outcomes.

What is the Leeds ABCD model?

Leeds ABCD has been successfully developed across a range of different communities in Leeds. The essence of ABCD is about enabling citizen-led change, working within a specific neighbourhood or community and mobilising local assets. Overall, the evaluation found that there was good understanding of the ABCD model and support for the principles of asset-based working in the pathfinder sites, across the programme and with stakeholders. This translated into practical ways of working that were relational, empowering and sought to identify individual and community strengths, in line with the case for ABCD set out in our accompanying literature review (Woodward et. al, 2021). While support for ABCD was strong, there were caveats; notably that ABCD should not substitute for services in a period of austerity. The limitations of ABCD in the context of significant socio-economic and health inequalities have been highlighted by others (Agdal et al., 2019, Friedli, 2013).

Using the evidence gathered, we were able to refine the original Theory of Change (based on the previous Common Evaluation Framework) to show the links between community-based activities, the underlying mechanisms and the outcomes that result. This current Theory of Change articulates the Leeds ABCD model, matched to supporting evidence.

How and why has the Leeds ABCD model evolved in different areas?

ABCD is not a standardised community-based intervention and therefore can be expected to develop differently in different communities (McLean et al., 2017). Our evaluation shows that context matters and that the starting points for ABCD development were markedly different across pathfinder sites. The social and economic challenges in Leeds communities meant that while some ABCD neighbourhoods were thriving despite these challenges, others were seen as struggling. This all influenced how Community Builders worked. The size of patches also varied. Despite these differences, evidence from the six pathfinder sites showed that the fundamental mechanisms of the ABCD model were operating in each area. The community profiles presented in Section 3a show how

the model worked in specific areas. There are very few evaluations that have looked at the implementation of ABCD across multiple communities in this way (SERIO, 2019, Torbay Community Development Trust, 2020, Ward, 2019) and it adds to the strength of findings.

It was not possible to draw conclusions about the ideal size for ABCD work; however, the need to work in natural neighbourhoods and to start in 'pockets' or groups of streets were important themes. This 'hyper-local' working was a facilitating factor in the ABCD response to COVID-19 pandemic.

How does ABCD work in Leeds communities?

Core elements of the Leeds ABCD model have fidelity to the original ABCD model (Kretzmann, 1998, Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, Mathie and Cunningham, 2005). We were keen to explore how assets were identified, mobilised and strengthened. Community Builders have key roles here, as they encouraged residents, facilitated connections and offered practical help, expertise and emotional support. These roles require skilled community workers willing to work on their own and in non-hierarchical ways. Building trust is the 'magic ingredient' that is needed to grow activity, confirming the centrality of the relational aspects of ABCD (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, McLean et al., 2017). It is possible Community Builders built up a positive picture of their role for the evaluation, as funding/jobs depend on the success of the work. This seems unlikely as barriers and constraints as well as facilitating factors were freely discussed in interviews and in the learning & evaluation events. Overall, the evaluation collected evidence from multiple sources that showed that changes in the way of working to a more asset-based orientation allowed Community Builders, and communities, to achieve outcomes.

The evaluation findings raise some questions about asset mapping. We found that Leeds ABCD pathfinders tended to start with relationship building and listening in the community, rather than asset mapping. Asset mapping is important as a process of identifying and articulating local assets, as it helps develop further conversations and locate assets. Expectations of outcomes from asset mapping varied and not all ABCD pathfinders produced a formal map that could be shared.

How does ABCD work at neighbourhood level and in terms of reach and participation, who gets involved and how?

The original ABCD model uses the notion of primary building blocks (under the control of the community), secondary building blocks like local services, and potential building blocks (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). The evaluation showed that while primary building blocks varied between

pathfinders, it was possible to develop community action in varied contexts. Community groups and Neighbourhood Organisations emerged as a key category of asset. Having a building or centre for social activities was a facilitating factor, but there were pros and cons about whether ABCD needed be hosted by a Neighbourhood Organisation. Other practical facilitating factors included spaces to meet and Small Sparks funding. Overall, the physical, social and individual assets of an area should be seen as interwoven and learning suggests that ABCD needs to quickly tap into those elements of community infrastructure that can help.

Community Builders were able to identify members of the community already contributing or willing to contribute to their community, called Community Connectors. Having local residents leading, developing and sustaining social activities is essential for ABCD to be successful. There was good evidence that this is starting to happen in the ABCD pathfinders, although there was a wide range in numbers between pathfinder sites. Due to the pandemic, we were not able to interview as many Community Connectors as we had hoped, and this is a limitation of the evaluation.

Successful recruitment of Community Connectors and volunteers has also been shown in other evaluations (Torbay Community Development Trust, 2020, Wildman et al., 2019). It is difficult to assess if the numbers reported in Leeds ABCD monitoring data represent good reach into the community. Ageing Well Torbay ABCD programme, which covers 30 neighbourhoods, reports 1367 Connectors over 3 years, whereas an asset-based project in the North East 'Come Eat Together' involved 367 volunteers (Wildman et al., 2019). Given the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering (Jenkinson et al., 2013, Jones et al., 2016), and the potential for social return on investment of resident-led activities and even enterprises (see section 5), tracking the number of volunteers, including new volunteers, could be a key indicator of success for Leeds ABCD. Ideally collecting some information on demographic characteristics would be useful to give a fuller picture of who participates.

There was some qualitative and case study evidence of individual journeys that demonstrate people moving from social isolation to inclusion. The extent to which people from disadvantaged groups, who are often recipients of services, are able to move to being seen as assets, contributing their skills, knowledge and time could be a measure of reach. More quantitative data on this would be helpful.

Does ABCD lead to positive change?

A key question was whether ABCD worked and led to positive outcomes. Section 7 provides a detailed map of evidence and an assessment of the strength of evidence triangulated from different sources

and across different areas. The overall conclusion is that ABCD was leading to improved outcomes for individuals and communities across the three core outcomes:

- Individuals and communities are better connected
- People have good friends
- Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see

The strongest evidence was around having better social connections. This is perhaps unsurprising as social connections and strengthened networks is both an outcome from ABCD and a means to develop further work. Improvements in the social connectedness of individuals and the reduction of social isolation are key outcomes that improve wellbeing and reduce health risks (Public Health England and UCL Institute of Equity, 2015, Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). The ‘having good friends’ outcome indicator is very difficult to evaluate due to the subjective nature of what a good friend is. However, this was the outcome that always received the strongest support in any discussion with Community Builders. It also has a high social value (Powdthavee, 2008). The evaluation was able to tease out some of the qualitative aspects of meaningful connections for individuals – including engaging in good-natured conversations with others, sense of belonging, improved mental health and independence.

There was strong evidence of a journey of community-led change moving from motivation and the ideas stage, to processes of coming together and eventually leading to action. Individual and community empowerment are important outcomes (Whitehead et al., 2016). There are alternative community engagement and community empowerment approaches that share some the principles of how community participation is built with ABCD (Public Health England and NHS England, 2015, Brunton et al., 2015). The key elements are about bringing people together and genuinely shifting control to individuals and communities to determine their priorities.

An interesting finding, and one that might have significance for development of ABCD, is the range of additional outcomes reported; for example, opportunities for training and employment, changing practices in local organisations, and individuals reporting improved health and wellbeing. There was reasonably strong qualitative evidence of these other ‘unanticipated’ outcomes and some of these were included in the SROI. Employment is an important outcome and a major determinant of health. Other community-based approaches, particularly those focused on volunteering, can lead to improved employment opportunities, both through individual pathways and through creating more employment opportunities in the community (Flanagan and Sadowksi, 2011, Bagnall et al., 2020).

An unanticipated positive outcome has been the community mobilisation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not possible to say how much of this can be attributed to ABCD, as the community response has been significant throughout UK; however, Community Builders were quickly able to orientate their work and tap into mutual aid groups, further joining up community action. This is all in the context of the difficulty of working online when this model is very much person-to person. It is testament to the flexibility of the Community Builder role and the importance of social connections in ABCD that the programme was able to contribute to the local response.

How does ABCD work in as a city-wide programme?

The ABCD programme is led by Leeds City Council and this programme-level support has been a facilitating factor for work in the pathfinders. Key challenges included balancing the ethos of ABCD with the commissioning process, managing the relationship with neighbourhood organisations and the need for monitoring and accountability.

The evaluation found strong support for ABCD in Leeds City Council and allied organisations. What was valued by stakeholders was the leadership support, leading to a culture of permission to innovate and willingness to cede control and accept risk. ABCD was seen as bringing additional value to the existing community infrastructure and services, but there were caveats around ABCD not replacing services, and whether the current commissioning model provides the best fit with the empowerment principles of ABCD.

Growing ABCD

There are ambitions, recognised by Leeds City Council, stakeholders and Community Builders, to spread ABCD as a model of working. The notion of scale was critiqued in the learning events as the core of ABCD should be about working within natural neighbourhoods, continuing to strengthen and connect local community-led activity. Notwithstanding this principle, opportunities to grow the approach in the city were highlighted, such as embedding of ABCD into leadership training. Incorporating the principles of asset-based working into other services is seen as one way forward but one that may dilute ABCD and result in it being more service rather than citizen-led.

Capturing change

This evaluation was designed to both provide an assessment of the implementation of the Leeds ABCD programme and outcomes. An important strand has been developing an evaluation approach that was genuinely collaborative and based on the principles of asset-based working (Rippon and South, 2017).

This was reflected in the:

- evaluation workshops that supported Community Builders to self-evaluate
- approach to data collection, for example the use of community walks
- learning set with the Leeds City Council ABCD team members
- joint work on how monitoring data is captured
- summative learning & evaluation events to validate findings.

The challenges of capturing impacts and outcomes in a relational, developmental model where activities differ between communities are apparent (Cassetti et al., 2019, de Andrade and Angelova, 2020). The pandemic is a further challenge for the evaluation. Nonetheless, we were able to highlight common themes around benefits of ABCD, processes and outcomes. This evaluation meets some evidence gaps identified in the literature review (Woodward et al. 2021). It is a robust, qualitative study over multiple sites, with some triangulation of data and providing evidence of outcomes at a community-level. The next stage of building the evidence base for Leeds ABCD will be taking this qualitative evidence and considering if it can be translated into some common measures or methods of capturing change across the programme.

The monitoring data, both qualitative reports and quantitative data, provided a rich source of information. We cannot draw strong conclusions from the numbers due to some of the challenges of capturing data, for example differences in the way people define 'Connectors' and whether all groups can be attributed to ABCD. It was possible to use the data from two pathfinder sites to undertake a SROI, which in one project showed a significant return on investment based on recognised social value measures. This was always intended as a pilot of the methods and it has proved possible to conduct an SROI that illuminates some of the social value of ABCD.

This section has summarised key learning from this evaluation, discussing them in relation to existing evidence. Recommendations for practice and research are now presented.

Section 9: Conclusions & Recommendations

Leeds ABCD programme exemplifies the principles of asset-based approaches, working to improve the lives of people living in different communities across the city. This collaborative evaluation has involved the research team working closely with the Leeds City Council ABCD team and Community Builders to gather evidence about what works and how. While this is an established programme, the shift to citizen-led activity takes time and it is still early days for some pathfinder sites. Nonetheless, the evaluation has collected strong evidence about how ABCD works and what the mechanisms of change are. This is not about a single innovative project, instead the evaluation shows how a city-wide approach can be implemented and lead to neighbourhood connections and activities.

There is a recognised need for better evidence on ABCD and what outcomes result. This evaluation has explored impacts and benefits in depth, supported self-evaluation by Community Builders and undertaken a pilot Social Return on Investment in two pathfinders. The results, based mainly on qualitative research, show strong evidence of positive outcomes for individuals and communities that are linked to the ABCD approach. More needs to be known about how many people this approach benefits.

The Leeds City Council ABCD programme holds a vital role in current and future work. The issues around the ongoing development, spread and sustainability of asset-based working in pathfinders and in the city was also explored in the evaluation. We now set out some recommendations and issues for consideration which hopefully can inform programme development.

Leeds ABCD model

- Continue to develop the ABCD programme as a means of improving social connectivity and building neighbourhood action. This will have longer term benefits for individual wellbeing and will help strengthen the social infrastructure that keeps people well and supported in their communities.
- Maintain the core programme philosophy as this is a coherent vision that is understood and supported. This emphasises the relational, non-hierarchical, empowering processes that support work in and by communities. Leadership is important here, but also the ABCD training, the network of Community Builders, and gaining the support of Neighbourhood Organisations and other allies.

- Use and evolve the Theory of Change. While ABCD cannot change everything in communities, there is a consistent message about the importance of social connections and meaningful relationships. This is expressed in a phrase that had much resonance across the programme and beyond – ‘people have good friends’.

Developing the programme

- The evaluation found broad support for asset-based working and what it offers communities and services. This provides a foundation for thinking about the future direction of the programme. Options include additional pathfinder sites, strengthening the ABCD network and integrating asset-based working into other services.
- Longer term investment is needed as it takes time to embed new ways of working and change power dynamics. This is illustrated by the SROI results where there is a contrast between the relative maturity of an older and a newer pathfinder. Consider whether working with groups or neighbourhoods which start with less ‘social capital’ requires longer term funding to grow the assets, over a period of 3-5 years.
- Communities vary greatly, in ways that cannot be defined simply by deprivation levels. Consider how more structural help can be offered to areas with particularly high levels of problems e.g. crime or housing, in a way that links to what ABCD can offer in terms of social action. A theme of the evaluation was the interplay between responding to needs and mobilising assets, including in pandemic response. This ‘twin-track’ approach could form part of the city’s approach to tackling health inequalities.
- Locating asset-based approaches into wider council teams and services e.g. Libraries and Housing, offers a positive platform from which to build opportunities with people and place them at the heart of decision-making about their communities.

Building the ABCD pathfinders

- Consider whether an initial preparatory period is needed prior to an ABCD pathfinder site being established. This is a different way of working and needs time and some local knowledge to be built up. One aspect might be identifying whether there is a building or space that can be used initially for community organising. Another aspect might be exploring expectations with neighbourhood organisations in terms of their commitment to ABCD.

- Size matters as community building needs to occur, at least in the early days, in relatively small patches that people can identify with, what are often called 'natural neighbourhoods'. There is potential for organisational models and structures that can host multiple ABCD projects, but the starting point should remain a small patch.
- Continue working with Neighbourhood Organisations to support them developing an asset orientation. These can be key building blocks for Community Builders, Connectors and residents and advocates for an asset-based approach.
- Continue to support Community Builders in their role and offer them chances to connect and to learn. These are key roles and investing in the individual and enabling them to work in an asset-based way is critical to the success of the pathfinders.
- Explore ways of ensuring that the diversity of Leeds communities is reflected in the cohort of Community Builders. Working with different communities, including BAME groups was part of the original approach to ABCD development. The programme is at a good point to reflect if developing ABCD with a focus on specific groups, for example men or specific BAME communities, would bring additional benefits.
- Consider the pros and cons of pathfinders formalising their asset map in a way that others can access the information. Accepting that the process is more important than the outcome, there may be benefits in visualising or documenting the map of local assets. This might increase community ownership and also be helpful for tracking progress. Community ownership could be increased through a focus on a particular topic e.g. doing a 'walking' map of assets together.
- Recognise that there is a spectrum of activity from committed volunteers to more informal acts of neighbourliness. ABCD is both about surfacing and strengthening the social action in communities and also about drawing new people into activity. Given existing evidence on the detrimental impacts of social isolation, people new to activity are likely to gain the most benefits in terms of social support, social connections and friends. Some of the qualitative evidence points to this as individuals go from being isolated to playing an active role with multiple connections.
- Although a common language is needed at programme level, the language of assets, asset mapping and Community Connectors does not sit well with practical community work. Consider alternatives to the term 'Community Connector' so that people can easily identify with the role they are doing in the community, but at the same time, it is possible to monitor numbers in a consistent way.

Capturing change – research recommendations

- ABCD will develop differently in different areas because assets are not fixed but identified and mobilised by residents. The same level of positive outcomes cannot be expected from each area; however, the evaluation has shown that an increase in social connections, groups and community activities can be expected.
- Refresh the core monitoring information that needs to be collected, which should include quantitative and qualitative data. The refined Theory of Change could be used to structure this as it sets out inputs, mechanisms and outcomes, plus some additional outcomes which could be incorporated e.g. employment. Information on how many people new to activities and how many groups formed might be good indicators of reach and increased community capacity. There is scope to improve the definition and collection of data on Community Connectors, as there is much underpinning evidence on the economic and social value of volunteering.
- Continue to support Community Builders to capture evidence and develop their evaluation skills. The evaluation workshops at the beginning were valued by participants.
- Work with Leeds Public Health team and Leeds Observatory to identify an indicator set that can be used to track change. There is potential to integrate asset maps with this in order to document changes in community capacity, resilience and activity over time.
- Commission follow up research with Community Connectors and active community members as this aspect of the evaluation was not fully carried out due to the pandemic and would give valuable insights into the relative impact and reach of the ABCD programme. Community walks and joining groups/activities is a good way to gather information in a way that respects people's time and knowledge.
- There is value in doing further SROIs, using a common methodology, as it provides a summary that can help decision-makers assess 'Value for Money'. It makes sense to keep the pathfinders separate rather than pool them all as the contexts are so different and some have a thriving centre and networks to draw on, while others are at the beginning of their journey. Eventually, an overall programme SROI can be completed.

Section 10: References

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Section 11: Appendices

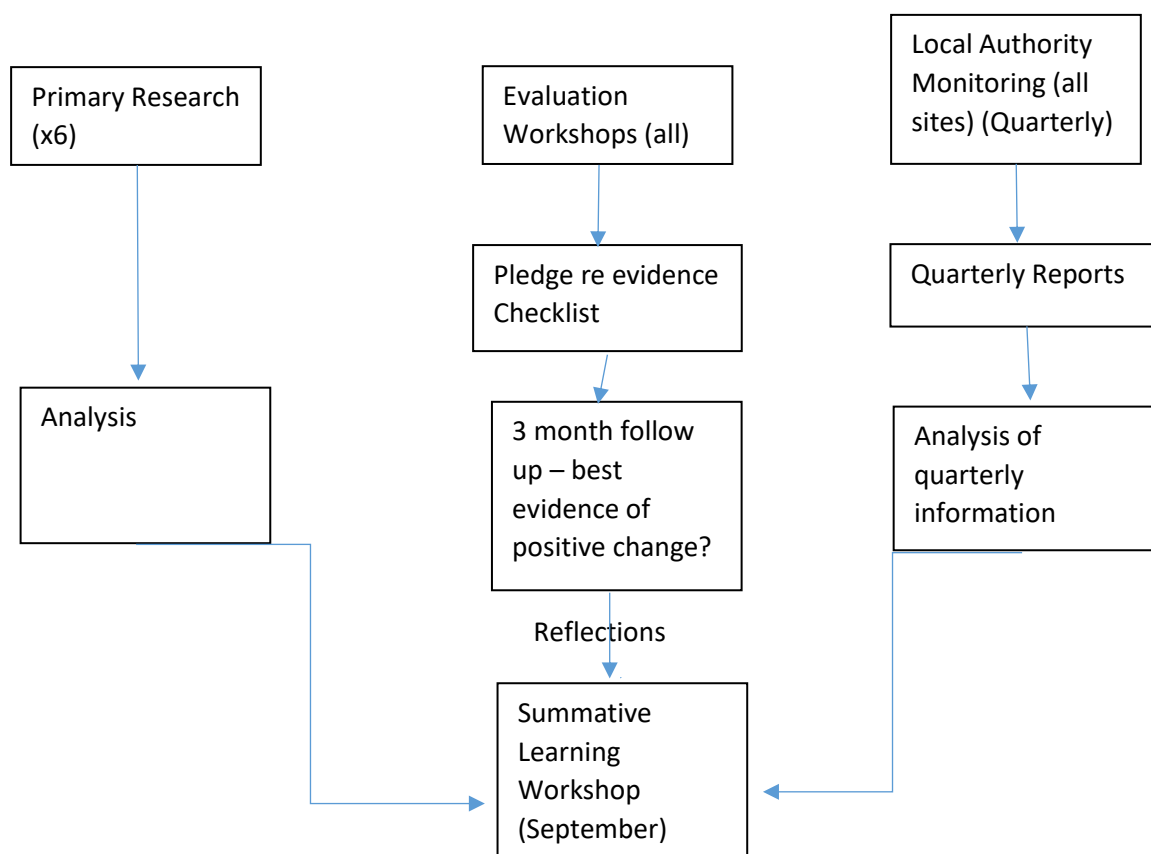
Appendix 1: ABCD in Leeds Common Evaluation Framework

Outcome	Underpinned by	Indicators	Evidence
<i>Individuals and communities are better connected</i>	Community connectors being knowledgeable and well-linked in their local area.	Community connector have a thorough knowledge of their area	Local asset maps (including how they are shared / accessed and maintained)
		Increasing numbers of community connectors in areas	Quarterly reporting
	People are connected around their passions and interests (including through digital connections).	Number of people connectors have met with	Community Builder Log/diary Social Media pages
		Number of groups formed and sustained around an interest	Quarterly reporting from pathfinders
	People's gifts and interests are recognised and valued.	Local people recognise and have knowledge of the areas assets	Community Builder Log/diary
		Pathfinders have different mechanisms to hear and support people's ideas	Organisational work plans

	Small Sparks funding is available to people to get an idea going and make changes.	Events, groups and changes that happen are initiated and sustained by local people	Quarterly reporting from pathfinders / Small Sparks paperwork
<i>Communities identify and work to bring about the changes they want to see</i>	The interdependencies of communities are recognised and strengthened.	Number of groups formed and sustained around an interest.	Quarterly reporting from pathfinders / Small Sparks grant paperwork
	Communities are resilient and able to recover and sustain their effort when things go wrong.	Number of times things don't work out, but community effort continues	Log/diary
	Assets of an area are recognised by local people and others.	Number of celebration events and number of attendees.	Quarterly reporting from pathfinders
		People talk more positively about where they live.	Case Studies Log/diary
	Individuals and groups are supported to have the tools to take action.	Number of sessions providing capacity building support and tools.	Quarterly reporting from pathfinders
		Range and number of groups	Organisation's timetable/diary
	Communities are able to influence key decisions made by the council and other public bodies.	Number of changes communities achieve with support from the council, where appropriate.	Quarterly reporting from the pathfinders
<i>People have good friends</i> <i>Intermediate Outcomes:</i>	All members of the community are welcome and included in community spaces and activities	Community connectors are as diverse as the local community.	Anonymous profile of community connectors/Quarterly reporting from pathfinders

<p><i>People have relationships with people who are not paid to be in their lives.</i></p> <p><i>People chose to take part in a range of things in their leisure time.</i></p>		Community connectors link with people who received high levels of care services and have not previously been able to share their gifts and passions.	Community Builder Log/diary
	<p>Reciprocal relationships are established (you get something, I get something).</p> <p>Services support people to make connections beyond paid workers and other people accessing the same services</p>	<p>People say they feel less lonely.</p> <p>People know more of their neighbour's (first) names.</p> <p>Number of activities happening without any Community Builder input.</p> <p>Changes to business plans/strategies/funding agreements.</p> <p>Organisations understand the importance of being well connected for individuals.</p> <p>Number of organisations recognising the importance of adopting asset-based approaches.</p>	<p>Case studies</p> <p>Community Builder Log/diary</p> <p>Log/diary/quarterly reporting</p> <p>Meetings with organisations/organisational documentation</p> <p>Training registers and training feedback</p> <p>Quarterly returns from ABCD Catalyst</p>

Appendix 2: Data Sources Flow Chart – original plan



Appendix 3: Community Builder walk and interview topic guide

Part 1 – pre-walk (held in a convenient place e.g. their office or a café)

- 1) Can you tell me what your role is?
 - a. How did you come to be in this role? (Existing employee? New to area?)
 - b. What does the role involve?
- 2) Tell me about the area you work in
 - a. Who lives here? Demographics
 - b. What is area like?
 - c. What is the area known for?
- 3) How would you explain the ABCD approach?
 - a. How does it work here?
 - b. How have you gone about identifying assets?
 - c. What do you think the Community Builder role is about? Is it a new way of working for you?
 - d. How do you put the theory into practice? How does it look in practice?
- 4) How has the project been received by the local residents? Who has got involved?
- 5) Can you talk me through what you're going to show me today (assets)? Draw map?
- 6) Why have you chosen this walk?

Part 2 – walking

Community Builder is asked to tell the researcher about the area as they walk around

Follow up questions – most of the interview will be reacting to the tour.

- 1) What has changed since you came into post?
 - In the community/organisation/individuals?
- 2) What changes would residents like to see? How did you establish what the priorities were?
- 3) How are assets identified? Where did you start?
 - Do the community members agree on what they consider assets/which the main ones are?
- 4) What are most important assets in this community?
 - How have you built on these?
- 5) Why is this place (identified on walk) important to the community?
- 6) Have you faced any challenges? Please expand.
- 7) What have been your biggest successes so far?
- 8) What do you hope the project will have achieved in a year's time?
- 9) What advice would you give to a Community Builder who is new to this approach?

Part 3 – post-walk: cover the questions above that weren't discussed on the walk.

Appendix 4: Residents discussion group guide

ABCD is about recognising assets the community already has...

Activity – map of area: participants add post-it notes to the map to show physical assets of the neighbourhood and also assets/resources the community members bring.

Different coloured post-it for negative aspects of the area/things they would like to change.

- 1) Can you tell me about your area?
 - a) What is the best thing about living here?
 - b) What are most important assets?
 - c) What is your area known for in Leeds?
- 2) Why/how did you get involved in this project?
 - a. What were your expectations of it?
- 3) What have you been involved in?
- 4) How would you describe what x (*Community Builder*) has been doing in this area (this is called an ABCD approach)?
- 5) Have you seen any changes have you seen in your area since x came into post? What are they?
- 6) Has anything changed in your life as a result of being part of this community group?
- 7) Have you experienced any difficulties as part of this work?
- 8) What do you hope to have achieved in a year's time?
 - a. What changes would you still like to see in your area?
 - b. Why?
 - c. How can they be achieved?
- 9) Do you have any advice for other areas who would like to work with Community Builders/adopt ABCD?
- 10) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the project?

Appendix 5: Information sheet for discussion group attendees



ABCD Evaluation Information

For Discussion Group Attendees

Hello,

Our names are Jenny, Jane, Susan and Sarah and we work at Leeds Beckett University. We are looking at how the ABCD project is working in different parts of Leeds and we are interested in what you have to say.

We are asking people who have been involved with ABCD, in their area, to take part in a discussion group that will last between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. We will be looking at what people think is good about their community (this is sometimes called an 'asset map') and talking about the changes that have been made. We would like you to take part if possible.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part or not, please take the time to read this information. This is now yours to keep. If you have any questions, please contact one of us using our details that are overleaf. We are more than happy to talk to you.

What is this about?

Leeds City Council have asked the Centre for Health Promotion Research at Leeds Beckett University to evaluate the ABCD programme. This means we will be trying to find out how ABCD works in different areas of Leeds and what effect it has on local communities.

What will taking part involve?

In the discussion group there will be us, you and some other people who have been involved with ABCD in the area. We will be asking you to talk about your involvement, for example:

- How did you get involved in ABCD and what do you like about it?
- Has it helped you and the community? In what way?

With your agreement we would like to audio record the discussion so that we can remember everything that is said. If you are uncomfortable with this, let us know, and we will stop recording. We will provide refreshments.

Consent

Taking part is **voluntary**. You can refuse to take part or to answer certain questions. Before we start, we will ask for your informed consent. You can give us this by completing a short form. If you change your mind, you can withdraw what you have said, up until **1st July 2020** – after that it becomes difficult to separate everything out. You can do this by contacting one of us listed overleaf.

What will happen to the information and results?

We are very careful about information given to us. We store everything in line with the Data Protection Act and only the evaluation team have access to it. We will never pass on your information to anyone else.

- Recordings are saved securely on a university computer that is password protected.
- Consent forms are stored in a locked filing cabinet.
- If we take a photo of the map, this will be stored on a university computer that is password protected

Anonymity

We will be writing a report for Leeds City Council based on what we find out. We may share this with other researchers and professionals through journal articles and conferences.

Your real name, or any other person information, will not be used, so you can not be identified.

The discussion group is confidential. However, if anyone says something that makes us worry about their safety, or the safety of others, we will pass this on to the relevant authorities.

Checking our findings

In Autumn 2020 we will be checking our findings with a variety of people; the ABCD team at Leeds City Council, Community Builders and other participants.

If you would like to be invited to this event please fill in your details on the consent form. This will not be used for any other purpose.

Contact Details

We are all based in the School for Health and Community Studies at Leeds Beckett University.

Susan Coan
Research Officer
[0113 81 28496](tel:01138128496)
S.Coan@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Jenny Woodward
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0113 81 25856
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Sarah Papadimos
Secretary
0113 81 29649
s.papadimos@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Jane South
Professor of Healthy Communities
0113 81 24406
j.south@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the evaluation team please contact;

Louise Warwick-Booth
0113 81 24341
l.warwick-booth@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Postcard for residents 'bumped into' during community walks

Front Side

Talking about ABCD in *(area)*

Leeds City Council logo

Leeds Beckett University logo

Reverse Side

Hello,

I am here from Leeds Beckett University to find out more about the work *(named Community Builder)* is doing here in *(area)*. This is part of the ABCD project *that (the neighbourhood organisation)* is doing in the area, which is funded by Leeds City Council.

We would love to know what you think about the work *(Community Builder name)* is doing.

- Do you think *(Community Builder's name)* work has made a difference to *(area)*?
- Has it made a difference to you or your family?

You need to know, we have a recorder on and we might use what you say in a report for Leeds City Council. We would NOT use your name though.

Please say if you are happy with this or not and ask me if you would like more information.

Thank you! *(name of researcher)*

Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form



ABCD Evaluation Consent Form

	Please Tick if you agree
I have read the information sheet for this evaluation.	
I have had the chance to answer questions and am satisfied with the answers.	
I understand that taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw up until 1 st July 2020, by contacting the evaluation or ABCD teams.	
I understand that, if I agree, the discussion will be recorded (audio only) and then written down. After the evaluation, the recordings will be destroyed. Any information given to the university will be stored securely in line with data security regulations.	
I know that all the information about me and other participants must remain strictly private and confidential. However, I understand that if the evaluation team are concerned about someone's safety, they will notify relevant authorities, the ABCD team and the host organisation.	
I agree that the evaluation results can be published but that no identifying details will be included and any quotations will be anonymous.	
I agree to take part in the evaluation and I am willing to take part in an interview or a focus group.	

Signed

Date

Name (in capitals)

Appendix 8: Learning Event Plans

What we said we would do (from Ethics):

A final summative learning workshop in September 2020. All the Leeds City Council team and representatives from all the pathfinder sites will be invited. We will present early findings and through discussion and participatory exercises, findings will be challenged or confirmed and the Theory of Change refined. This element of respondent validation is important for building the Leeds story of ABCD and again is in keeping with asset-based methods.

The interim evaluation findings will be presented at the summative learning event. This will allow those who have been involved in the ABCD project to discuss the findings and validate/challenge. This shared building of explanations is in keeping with an asset-based approach to data collection (Rippon & South 2017).

Aim:

To create a collaborative space where researchers, pathfinders and Leeds City Council staff can discuss the findings and the implications for research and practice.

Objectives:

- To present and discuss interim findings as a sense check and validation/challenge of what has been found and how it relates to Theory of Change.
- To hear about evidence collected from self-evaluation and how it can be used to build a story of impact.
- To coproduce a shared understanding of the implications for future practice, programme development and evaluation.

Who will be invited:

- Leeds City Council team (4)
- Community Builders – if no CB currently employed, manager for that site to be invited instead (17)
- LBU Researchers (Event 1; 4 Event 2, 5) Plus note-taker.
- Yoga teacher

**There will be 2 further 1 hour online meetings – one for community connectors and active residents and one for other stakeholders (including Managers of the CBs) to hear a summary of findings and comment – also to ask what's important. These will be held in late November / early December (provisional date 1st December).*

Outline

- **Invitations to be sent out w/c 12th October**

To include an offer for people to test the technology prior to the event itself

To ask if they would like a 'pack' sent to them prior to the event – if so, to reply with address

Ask if there is one question or idea you'd like to share at the meeting

To make it clear who is invited i.e. CBs, Leeds City Council and LBU

- **Pre event**

Warm up - "here are some things we are going to be thinking about" message.

Anyone who sends their address will receive some goodies e.g. nice tea bag / brownies (or similar).
Plus simple craft items e.g. post-its and pens.

Asked, "what's your evidence of change?" Participants asked to collect -draw, think, write down evidence of outcomes.

- **Event 1 - Tuesday 10th Nov 10-12 (room open from 9.40am for informal chat)**

Focus: How ABCD works in Leeds and what is the evidence that it leads to positive changes in communities. **This session focuses on the pathfinder sites Next session focus is on Leeds programme**

Facilitator, back-up, plus note takers allocated

- 10.00 Welcome and introduction to events – starts at 10
- 10.05 Meeting etiquette – key points
- 10.10 Key findings presentation–10 key findings on 'how it works / how does change happen' and outcomes
- 10.20 - 5 mins questions
- 10.25 Thinking about community change (outcomes)*
 - Evidence on community change – pathfinders
 - Share 1 outcome via chat, drawing, verbal statement
- 10.35 Go into groups – 20 mins
- 10.55 Plenary feedback – reflections
- 11.00 Yoga session
- 11.10 Reconnect and introduce 3 themes
 - Asset Mapping - practice vs theory.
 - What makes a Community Connector?
 - How does the approach have to adapt to the area
- 11.15 Group discussion on how it works (themed groups) taking 2 of the key themes.
- 11.35 Plenary – feedback on themes
- 11.55 Closing remarks / Thank you

NB Breakout groups to be set up in advance (x4). People can be allocated / select which ones they go to on the day.

Event 2 Tuesday 17th November 10-12 (room open from 9.40am)

Focus: What does this all mean for how we work? What should be highlighted as important?

The focus will be broader than just the pathfinder sites i.e. council as a whole / beyond

NB Much of this can be adjusted after the first event once we know what worked well /what didn't / what still needs to be covered. We have a meeting scheduled to discuss on 11th November

Facilitator, back-up, plus note takers allocated

- Welcome and quick recap
- Revising the Theory of Change/story of what ABCD is about and what the impact is
- Brief presentation on findings beyond pathfinders. Few slides only.
- What is important here – group work
- Yoga session
- Brief presentation on SROI
- Group work - Recommendations going forward for:
 - pathfinders and how they work
 - for Leeds City Council programme
 - how capture evidence in future Leeds City Council.
- Plenary – for each group to present back.
- Final (fun) reflections on being involved in the evaluation

Appendix 9: SROI detailed values

This table summarises the investments made by Leeds City Council into the ABCD programme in the two sites, the outcomes demonstrated by the evaluation, and their costs or the value attributed.

Table 5: Costs and benefits attributed to Leeds ABCD pathfinders in LS14 and Horsforth

INPUTS								
Activity				Cost per item		Total cost per site		
Grant to pathfinder sites: includes Community Builder salary, some management time, volunteer expenses and Small Sparks grants				£21,000		£21,000		
Training: 2 days per annum				£50 per day		£100		
Leeds City Council staff time: 24 hours, including network meetings as a percentage of attendees (includes oncosts)				£21.13 per hour		£507.12		
TOTAL INPUTS						£21,607.12		
BENEFITS								
Measure	Unit value(s)	Source of unit value(s)	LS14: Number	LS14: Total value(s)	LS14: Selected value	Horsforth: Number	Horsforth: Total value(s)	Horsforth: selected value
Community Connectors - time	£8.72	National minimum wage	30, contributing a minimum of 2 hours per week	£27,206.40 (60 hours p.w. for 1 year)	£27,206.40	3, contributing a minimum of 2 hours per week	£2,720.64 (6 hours p.w. for 1 year)	£2,720.64
Community Connectors – wellbeing benefits of volunteering to the volunteer	£13,500	(Fujiwara et al., 2012)	30	£405,000	£405,000	3	£40,500	£40,500

Made a new friend	£15500 per person year	per per	BHPS data 1997-2003 (Powdthavee, 2008)	New social groups or with new members n=60-80 ¹¹	£930,000 - £1,240,000	£930,000	New social groups or with new members n=2 groups with 15-20 members.	£232,500 - £310,000	£232,500
	£769.60 per person year	per per	Annual spending on social and cultural activities (Social Value Lab, 2011)		£46,176 - £61,568			£11,544 - £15,392	
Decisions made to change something	£1400 pppy		Sense of autonomy and control (GVE)	Community consultation on changes to Rein park; 2 self-sustaining groups set up with 70 members	£98,000	£98,000	Cookery course (1 person) Natter bench (6 people)	£9,800	£9,800
TOTAL BENEFITS FOR LS14: £1,460,206.40									
TOTAL BENEFITS FOR HORSFORTH: £285,520.64									

SROI FOR LS14 = benefits/ inputs = £1,460,206.40/£21,607.12 = **£67.58** social value for every £1 invested (before adjustments)

SROI for Horsforth = benefits/ inputs = £285,520.64/£21.607.12 = **£13.21** social value for every £1 invested (before adjustments)

¹¹ The sense check with community builders indicated that 60 (and 15) were a fairer representation than 80 (and 20) of the steady state of group membership

Sensitivity analysis: As the previous sections indicate, estimates of this kind are inevitably subject to uncertainty. Adjusting for drop-off (50% reduction), deadweight (17% reduction) and attribution (50% reduction) brings the SROI to **£14.02** for LS14 and **£2.74** for Horsforth per £1 invested. There are also a range of social values that could be applied for impact. As this is a pilot study, we have not included all possible values, but for illustration we have included two very different values for the outcome “made a new friend”. The first and higher unit value of £15,500 is from an economic study of the monetary value of life satisfaction gained by an increase in frequency of interaction with friends, relatives and neighbours (Powdthavee, 2008). The second and lower unit value of £769.60 is from a SROI analysis of a craft café for reducing social isolation and loneliness in Scotland and represents the annual spend on social and cultural activities per year, that in theory may be replaced by the activities of the Craft Café (Social Value Lab, 2011). In the analysis we chose the first value, as we feel it represents a more direct assessment of the social value to individuals of making new friends, rather than the potential saving to an organisation. However, it is very high compared to the more conservative estimate. If we replace this estimate with the more conservative estimate, the adjusted SROI would be **£5.54** for LS14 and **£0.62** for Horsforth of social value per £1 invested.

It is also possible that volunteer time should not be accounted for, if the activities that the volunteers do would **not** otherwise be done by paid staff. If we remove the volunteer time from the benefits, the adjusted SROI is **£5.27** for LS14 and **£0.59** for Horsforth per £1 invested, using the most conservative estimates from the table.

In conclusion, with all the adjustments in place, in this pilot study, the **estimate of SROI for the LS14 pathfinder** is within the range of **£5.27 and £14.02** of social value returned for every £1 invested.¹²

The estimate of SROI for the less-established **Horsforth pathfinder** is within the range of **£0.59 and £2.74** of social value returned for every £1 invested.

¹² This value range is different from the early findings presented at the Leeds City Council Executive Board meeting in September 2020, as the sense checking process (step 6) took place after that meeting.